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**A Prophetic Politics
Community Organising and the Theopolitical Vision of the Urban Church**

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**A Prophetic Politics: Community Organising
and the Theopolitical Vision of the Urban
Church**

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**Doctorate in Theology and Ministry
2015**

Abstract

This thesis explores a return of social and political horizons to the urban church through the political practices of community organising. Organising's work is contextualised within the changing place of religion in society and Anglican parochial horizons in inner-urban areas. It provides a history of community organising in which its presence in England in recent decades is reflected upon. The social and political standpoint enabled by organising is discussed in relation to issues of embodiment in ecclesiology, liturgical and political theology. Connections between organising, liberation theology, the pluralist tradition, and aspects of Anglican social theology and ethics are also considered.

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Introduction

In 2010, the BBC broadcast the first episode of the comedy series *Rev.*¹ A priest arrives in an inner-city parish to be faced with a bewildering environment in which to exercise his ministry. The clergyman's encounters in church and community test his calling and vocation. Clergy working in contexts similar to that portrayed in *Rev.* told the writer of the series that they considered it more a documentary than a comedy.² The documentary qualities of *Rev.* were recognised by clergy because the television audience were observing, in the form of a situation comedy, something of the reality of life as an Anglican priest in a contemporary inner-urban area. Unusual in this clerical portrayal was its emphasis on the identity of the priest as the comedic factor in his encounters in church and community. Although a rather inept character, the vicar in the 1960s comedy *Dad's Army* took his place along with the butcher, the bank manager, and the undertaker, as a figure with some recognisable social standing in the more corporate Britain of the 1940s. In *Rev.*, by contrast, the vicar at St Saviour in the Marshes in 21st-century inner London is played as a more isolated figure rather than a stock character in the social imagination of the nation. He is portrayed as a person with more in common with the character of Colin perhaps, the vulnerable outsider whom the priest befriends.

The ministry of the priest in *Rev.* takes place in conditions in which the societal role of the clergy has lost power and influence. The pathos of *Rev.* lies in its representation of the priest as the lone symbol of a perhaps once more widely shared aspiration to communal virtue. Although the events of this drama were exaggerated for comic effect, many clergy were able to identify with the situation of the priest in *Rev.*

The origins of this thesis

I have been an Anglican parish priest in the multi-ethnic inner-London Borough of Lambeth for 20 years. My ministry has been exercised in conditions similar to those seen in *Rev.* The parishes I have worked in have been racially and ethnically diverse, deeply impacted by migration and the power of a market society under conditions of globalisation. Most of my ministry has been taken up with activities familiar to parish clergy: presiding at the Eucharist; preparing and preaching sermons; prayer and pastoral care; administration; chairing the PCC; service as a governor at the parish school; conducting funerals; preparing families and adults for baptism and confirmation and, much more occasionally, conducting weddings; always looking for ways to build up the mission of the local church as a community of faith and service; and balancing commitments to marriage and family with those to church and community. I felt compelled to become a priest and called to exercise this

¹ *Rev.*, 2010, www.bbc.co.uk

² 'The Writer of TV Comedy *Rev.*, James Wood, talks about the show which was inspired by his grandfather (and some boozy Vicars)', Mail Online, 5th Nov 2011. The series was based in part on experiences related to the writer, James Wood, by inner-city clergy themselves.

ministry in the inner-city. Twenty five years after ordination, I still think this ministry is the right one for me, yet I also reflect that I have spent these years with a fairly constant sense of what I have come to see as a hollowing out and loss of the societal dimensions of this ministry. Among priests, ministers, and pastors of various churches, the Anglican clergy are perhaps uniquely positioned to reflect upon the withering of the relations between their ministries and society as a whole. This is because historically they have enjoyed a politically established place in society, in which they have been charged to serve not just the gathered community at worship, but also the wider community of the parish. My experience has been that the loss for the Anglican clergy of the historic horizons within which their ministries have traditionally been located and expressed can lead to a state of disorientation, particularly in the case of the inner-city where this loss is most apparent. A recent report from my own Diocese of Southwark supports this, saying that over the last 50 years ‘the clergy have lost a sense of what they are for ...’, that they ‘lack an external reflection’, and that ‘... the mirror of society into which they look offers them no reflection’.³ This can lead, the report suggests, ‘to a paralysing malaise of not knowing what to be or to do or why’.

What has assisted me personally over the years to discover and face the conditions in the inner city, to reflect on the meaning of loss and erosion of communal dimensions to ministry, and to experience a hopeful current of constructive and faithful response to such conditions, has been the experience of participation in the politics of community organising as it has developed in London.⁴ ‘Community organising’ is a rather blunt, *portmanteau* term that refers to a tradition of participatory democracy. This tradition has its origins in the work of Saul Alinsky in inner-urban Chicago of the late 1930s. In the intervening decades, Alinsky’s work with churches has developed into a method for creating local ecumenical political publics, or ‘people’s organisations’, in which clergy and laity work together on issues of justice and the common good through a process of conversation, assembly, and action and reflection for change. The phenomenon of community organising was largely unknown in Britain before knowledge of Barack Obama’s youthful spell as a community organiser was publicised in the period before the American presidential election of 2008.

Since its beginnings in the United States, and in the context of its present ecumenical and international breadth,⁵ community organising has maintained a close but low-

³ Diocese of Southwark, ‘*Strategy for Ministry: Report from the Strategy for Ministry Group Approved by Diocesan Synod*’ (London, November 2012), pp. 33-36: www.southwark.anglican.org.

⁴ I first came across community organising as a curate in the Wolverhampton in 1993 and have been a clergy participant in the development of organising in London, including thirteen years as a trustee of London Citizens, since my arrival here in 1996.

⁵ London Citizens has synagogues and mosques as well as representation from a wide variety of churches among the 250 religious and secular organisations in its membership across London. Alinskyian Community Organising has been practiced in the Philippines and South Africa and in England since 1989, where it now exists as Citizens UK. There are also developing networks in France and Germany. The most detailed account and analysis of community organising as a political

profile relationship with churches, especially with Roman Catholic parishes. Although not officially recognised by the Roman Catholic community as an ecclesial movement, its politics have been practised ecumenically by substantial numbers of Catholics, lay and ordained, in the United States and further afield, and its work is now receiving increasing interest from the theological community.⁶

The origins of my thesis arise from what I have found to be the complementary relationship between my work as a parish priest in multi-ethnic inner-urban social conditions and my experience of the politics of community organising. This encounter led me to my research question: what could the urban church learn from community organising?

The effect of community organising on my own ministry has been to provide an opportunity for external reflection, a lack of which can be a source of confusion for many contemporary clergy, as suggested in the Diocese of Southwark report mentioned above.⁷ I have found that organising has worked as a mirror in which my ministry could be reflected upon and re-orientated.⁸ The research question of this thesis is guided by my experiences of this politics as an Anglican, and what might be learnt ecumenically for the social mission of the church in the contemporary city.

Previous research

In preparation for this thesis, I researched the influence of community organising on the views of an ecumenical sample of clergy who had engaged with London Citizens in recent years.⁹ In that research, I was exploring whether my sense of new perspectives opening up ecumenically for the church in the social and political dimensions of the church's life was shared by clergy from different traditions who, like me, had some experience of this politics. My interview questions were designed to see if the interviewees could articulate changes in their perception of ministry, society, politics and God, as a consequence of their participation in the London Citizens organisation. I found that this was largely the case and concluded my research with some preliminary explorations as to what community organising might

phenomenon is to be found in, Bretherton, L, *Resurrecting Democracy: Faith, Citizenship, and the Politics of a Common Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

⁶ See, Shannahan, C, *A Theology of Community Organizing: Power to the People* (London: Routledge, 2013); Bretherton, L, *Resurrecting Democracy: Faith, Citizenship, and the Politics of a Common Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Bretherton, L, 'Augustine, Alinsky, and the Politics of the Common Good', *Christianity and Contemporary Politics: The Conditions and Possibilities of Faithful Witness* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), pp.71-96; Hauerwas, S, and Coles, R, *Christianity, Democracy, and the Radical Ordinary: Conversations between a Radical Democrat and a Christian* (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2008); Ivereigh, A, *Faithful Citizens: A Practical Guide to Catholic Social Teaching and Community Organising* (London: DLT, 2010).

⁷ Diocese of Southwark, 'Strategy for Ministry: Report from the Strategy for Ministry Group Approved by Diocesan Synod' (London, November 2012), pp. 33-36: www.southwark.anglican.org.

⁸ The clergyman in the BBC TV comedy *Rev.* suffers from a loss of just such an external reflection.

⁹ Sichel, S, MFS (Ministerial Focused Study), *London Citizens and London Clergy: Exploring the influence of Community Organising on the Ministries of Clergy in London*, Kings College, London, 2011.

be saying to the church in relation to its witness in the midst of contemporary social, religious, and political conditions.

I described the impact of organising in impressionistic terms as revealing ‘an awareness of what was missing’. From an Anglican parochial perspective, this awareness pointed to the loss of historic, societal and political grounds for the church and for clergy as religious representatives in society. The marginalization of the clergy is hardly a novel insight for Anglicans, but my experience and research suggest that the clergy are now more deeply alienated in relation to mainstream society in inner-urban conditions than they were in the past.¹⁰ Rather than ‘marginal’, which suggests some residual relation of clerical ministry to a sense of society as a whole, the ministry of the clergy and the churches they represent in inner-urban settings has become more isolated. Their communal perspectives have become the views of a minority, widely unrecognised and much restricted in their range. This loss of a communal context for ministry reveals an occupational if not personal isolation for clergy, which is continued by their territorial deployment as religious representatives in a societal field where their representative powers have declined. A broader recognition and need of traditional clerical roles has faded and a sense of ministry as an encompassing way of life in relation to a more cohesive sense of society has deteriorated. This thesis seeks to deepen reflection upon these conclusions and develop them by exploring how community organising might be speaking a timely Word to the urban church.

The emphasis of my perspective on community organising

Community organising is an ecumenical practice of local democracy. Its comparatively recent arrival here might suggest that this thesis would focus on its practice and teachings. There is I believe certainly something educational, novel, and indeed revelatory for ecclesial participants mediated through the politics of community organising, yet its political practice and teachings are not the focus of this thesis. I have found that the long-term impact of community organising in my own ministry has been not simply to provide a new opportunity for a faithful form of political engagement, but more importantly the work has served as a kind of mirror that has changed the way in which I practice, see, and think about my ministry as an Anglican priest. A practice of politics has suggested a dimension of ecclesial life both at home in and yet usually absent from the lived-life of the local church and in which some reorientation of the practice and reflection upon ministry itself has occurred. This has resulted in a different emphasis in my interpretation of what might be learnt by the church from community organising than other approaches.

The intention of this thesis is not to present a study of community organising or its practices, although an account of its history is given in chapter two and I do refer some of its practices and teachings. Rather, it attempts to explore the theological and

¹⁰ For example, Towler, R, and Coxon, A.P.M, *The Fate of the Anglican Clergy* (London: Macmillan, 1979).

political dimensions that can open up for the church through this politics. It attempts to reflect on what such dimensions can teach us about both the fate and future of the social and political role of the church in our multicultural towns and cities. This emphasis on what the church might learn from community organising makes my perspective on it somewhat different from studies that interpret it largely in more secular terms.¹¹

This thesis explores the impact of community organising on the church's life as a visible and public people of God in post-secular conditions. I attempt to refract such a perspective firstly through my own Anglican frame of reference. The Anglican clergy, as members of an established church, have traditionally enjoyed a sense of entitlement and place in the social and political landscape of the nation, a position and perspective not shared in the same way by members other churches in England. In part, this thesis is a reckoning with and reflection upon the decayed circumstances of this ministerial legacy for Anglicans in the inner city and an exploration of how Anglicans acting ecumenically, and in the broadest sense, might see community organising as a creative reinterpretation of elements of its religious and political history. My identity as an Anglican who has learnt from community organising is important in the standpoint of this thesis, but I refer throughout to the 'church' as an ecumenical entity, while of course conscious of its historically divided forms. I nonetheless write in the spirit and hope of a deeper Catholicity to emerge in future decades.

The central claim of this thesis

Building on previous research and my own experience, this thesis claims that a discernment of the church as a social and political embodiment in the world can reappear through the politics of community organising. A sensibility of embodiment can be returned to the local church as a sociality and a generative and generous agency reemerge as an ecumenical horizon for the church in urban conditions.

Jacques Maritain, the Catholic philosopher and friend of Alinsky and his work, thought it unlikely that his politics could be duplicated in Europe without 'a much longer and more exacting preparatory tilling of the soil'. This was so, Maritain argued, because societies in Europe were collectively 'imbued with politics', institutionalised politically in a way he thought was not the case in the more fluid, plural, and democratic conditions of mid-20th-century urban America.¹² Now that such fluid and plural, if not democratic, conditions have become normative for cities and towns across the globalised world, and European societies are far less collectively 'imbued' with politics in a period of widespread political disengagement, it is perhaps understandable why Alinsky's work with local churches in multi-ethnic neighbourhoods should be making greater claims on the church's attention.

¹¹ For example, Stout, J, *Blessed are the Organised* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013).

¹² Maritain, J, *Reflections on America* (New York: Charles Scribner's, 1958), pp.164-165.

An outline of the thesis

This thesis takes the social and political dimension of the church's life, which the practices of community organising have opened up, as an interrogative standpoint for a dialogue with a wider literature that illuminates aspects of the historical, ministerial, religious, social, and political context. A range of texts are discussed that address the conditions in which the Church of England and other churches find themselves in urban areas, and which provide insight into how the church might re-orientate and practice social and political dimensions of its life as a missional body in the world.

An outline of the chapters

In the first chapter I look to sociological, historical, and pastoral reflections on the context or ministry in the inner city that help illuminate the challenges faced by the church within its social and political horizons. Chapter two provides a history of community organising, including its recent presence in England and reflects on its reception here. In the third chapter I discuss the prophetic standpoint of community organisation in the context of issues of embodiment in ecclesiology, political theology, and social theory. I conclude with some practical suggestions as to how the benefits of community organising for the church might be sustained and what lessons might be learnt from its practice more generally for the future of the church as a missional body in today's world.

Chapter One:

After the horizons of Church and Society

Our thinking about society is a long debate between abstractions and actual relationships. The reality of society is the living organisation of men, women and children, in many ways materialised, in many ways constantly changing. At the same time, our abstract ideas about society, or about any particular society, are both persistent and subject to change. We have to see them as interpretations: as ways of describing the organisation and of conceiving relationships, necessary to establish the reality of social life but also under considerable pressure from experience. In certain periods, the interpretations satisfy experience in such a way that there is hardly any dispute at this level: the descriptions and concepts are deeply built in and accepted. In other periods there are degrees of discrepancy: a given description is felt to be inadequate, and is disputed; or a description is accurate yet is challenged by an alternative conception of relationships, so that the whole status and future of the society are put in question ...

Williams, *The Long Revolution*¹³

I have entitled this chapter 'After the Horizons of Church and Society' because my thesis proceeds on the basis that the ministry of the Church of England has been conditioned, in recent times, by a sense of its place in society, as described by Williams above, and that this has become the imagination of a minority, especially in the increasingly diverse towns and cities of Britain. The imagination of this minority was once a more culturally normative theopolitical vision, both sacred and secular of the church's place in English society and the state. A view upheld by social elites from 16th century visions of the church in a national civil society to twentieth century prospects of church and society under the social horizons of a welfare state. Under the 'pressure of experience', the latter of these perspectives, Williams's sense of society, from an inner-urban parochial perspective is no longer 'built in' as a plausible conception in which the church participates and thus, 'actual relationships' and 'abstractions' as well as the function and imagination of the church's place in the social order which has historically undergirded these has greatly eroded. What the Church of England now represents and how it relates as a national institution to a wider society and state has become more problematic.

Outline of the chapter

In this chapter I explore the breakdown in an Anglican conception of church and society by drawing attention to how this appears, explicitly or implicitly, in a range of social, pastoral and political commentary. I draw attention to a historical distinction between the social horizons of the church in civil society, and the social horizons of the church in society. The Church of England continues as a national institution in society and can be seen to be in mainstream institutional decline and in perspectives of renewal, particularly within evangelical, missional horizons. Such

¹³ Williams, R, *The Long Revolution* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1961), pp.101-102.

renewal is to be welcomed, yet the social and political horizons of its life as a body in society, historically central to its life, are not so often discussed directly. I argue that it is crucial to consider these dimensions of its life as a national church for the future of its witness in the society and state in which the church now finds itself. At the end of this chapter I reflect briefly on where the loss of institutional horizons of church and society in the state leaves parochial horizons in the inner city, and suggest that this loss also reveals possibilities for how the church's life in relation to society might re-emerge in a new social register.

A 'post-Durkheimian' dispensation

Despite the waning of the power and influence of the national church in society, as well as added responsibilities for managing buildings and fewer human and financial resources to sustain them, parish churches and the work of the parochial clergy endure, and in some places thrive, as presences in communities where the Gospel is proclaimed in word and sacrament. However, for the clergy in inner-urban parishes, it is the hollowing out of their ministries in relation to a wider sense of society as a whole which is the point at which William's 'pressure of experience' exerts its challenge within the clergy's parochial existence.

William's description of society is secular, although it is one in which the church of the early 1960s, when Williams was writing, could feel it participated from a religious point of view. Church and state could be perceived by the Church of England as sharing common horizons in a sacred and secular perspective mediated through the perception of a societal whole. Since the 1960s in particular, social, cultural, and political change, and a steep decline in support for historic churches like the Church of England has led to a more fragmented sense of the identity of the church and its ministry in society. Such a changing social context, I suggest, confirms Charles Taylor's description of a movement in modern societies towards what he terms a 'post-Durkheimian' religious dispensation.¹⁴

Taylor describes historical changes in our understanding of religion in modern Western societies. He pictures contemporary religion as existing within a complex mosaic of historic, and more recently emergent, social forms in which there is a confusion of 'continuity and discontinuity'.¹⁵ A pre-modern enchanted and sacralised world in which 'invocations of God were inseparable from public life'¹⁶ gradually, as in England, and sometimes more abruptly, gave way to a world in which the sacred fades and God's power and presence comes to be seen in the development of a religious sense of societal belonging. 'The presence of God in the cosmos is matched by the idea of his presence in the polity.'¹⁷ This development

¹⁴ Taylor, C, *Varieties of Religion Today* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2002), pp.93-97.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.69.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.64.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.66.

appears most clearly in the United States, but is also evident in societies like England in which there has been no formal separation of church and state. Taylor sketches the contemporary forms that religion takes in modern Western societies describing them as Durkheimian, paleo-Durkheimian, and neo-Durkheimian. These are differentiated conceptions of society's links to the sacred as society becomes the realm of mediation for the church's social horizons. A Durkheimian form of religion would see society as a sacred organic whole with little distinction between the sacred and the secular. The paleo-Durkheimian view accepts that society can be distinguished from the sacred, but still sees church and society as co-extensive. The neo-Durkheimian religious form has been crucial to the modern age in Taylor's analysis. A 'Protestant'¹⁸ transition takes place gradually, as in England, or more suddenly, as in France, in which there is a movement from a sacred to a secular society. God is present 'because it is his design around which society is organised'.¹⁹ The Church of England in Taylor's analysis retains ceremonial elements from its Catholic past, but is categorised as a Protestant, neo-Durkheimian religious development. The sovereignty of the monarch in a political state is crucial to the Church of England's identity in the national society that develops from the Elizabethan Settlement.

Most recently, and rapidly since the 1960s in Taylor's analysis, there has been an unravelling of this neo-Durkheimian form of religion in relation to society and the emergence and present dominance of what Taylor terms 'a post-Durkheimian' conception. Whereas in the neo-Durkheimian form of religion, freedom of choice assumes a greater importance in religious allegiance, such an allegiance is still connected to a sense of participation in society, whereas in the post-Durkheimian religious form, 'the spiritual is no longer intrinsically related to society'²⁰ and 'in the new order of expressive individualism'²¹ there is no necessary embedding of our link to the sacred in any particular broader framework, whether of church or state.²² Taylor argues that this shift alters the place of religion in public space and that as a consequence the various Durkheimian dispensations of religion have been destabilised and undermined.

Taylor's description of a post-Durkheimian dispensation, in which religious allegiance is detached from a sense of belonging to a wider church or society, is a broadly persuasive description of how Christianity can be observed in inner-urban areas today. More societal forms of church that once mediated a stronger sense of belonging to a wider and more collective sense of church or state continue, but generally a greater emphasis on individual choice and expression prevails, even within more paleo or neo-Durkheimian cultures of church life. This represents a challenge to the Church of England whose historical development coincided and

¹⁸ Ibid., p.71.

¹⁹ Ibid., p.76.

²⁰ Ibid., p.102.

²¹ Ibid., p.96.

²² Ibid., p.95.

adapted to the development of a national society in the state. With institutional decline making the church no longer so central to a sense of belonging in the nation, and with the dominance of individualism in a state in which the market has a more determining influence upon society, the transition for the church from being a structuring principle, influence, and servant of society presents it with challenges to its social vision now the post-Durkheimian form of religion Taylor describes has become normative.

The Anglican clergy in inner-urban areas lives and moves amidst the shifting horizons of Taylor's landscape of church and society and state. Many, perhaps most, who seek out a Christian allegiance want it to be primarily affirming and expressive of their importance as individuals in the sight of God, and more communal and sacramental forms of church life have become less intelligible and socially binding than for previous generations. The clergy have become less representative figures as an individualistic and multicultural society under the conditions of a globalised economy dismembers the more communal and representative horizons of the clergy and parishes in society.

Church and society

What is the response of the church and its clergy to these conditions? The response of many mainstream clergy and parishes to institutional decline, the fragmentation of the social horizons of religion and the more individualised and expressive turn in religious identity is to focus upon the rebuilding of their congregations and places of worship. This is important work for a church faced with the task of rebuilding ecclesial communities in changed social conditions, but Anglican clergy have historically been stationed to serve a society wider than the needs of the local congregation alone. The distinctions between the community of the church and a wider community were once less evident than they are today.

The Anglican clergy were traditionally part of the social elite, mediating the religious authority of the ruling culture of England through their status as ordained members of the gentry. The 19th century saw the clergy adapt to industrialisation and urbanisation, and the growth in population, by becoming a profession, like the legal and medical professions which similarly defined their boundaries and specialist knowledge as a caste, as a more complex and extended conception of society developed outside traditional hierarchies.²³ Whereas up to the nineteenth century the clergy's 'actual relations' were at one with the pyramidal horizons of the ruling elites in a hierarchical society, in the 19th century, the burgeoning, pluralising, and democratising horizons of an urbanising and industrialising society were to become the locus of interest to a regrouped and ordained profession.

²³ The classic text on ministry in the Church of England and its professionalisation in the 19th and 20th centuries remains: Russell, A, *The Clerical Profession* (London: SPCK, 1980).

Ordination became more important for the clergy as a group because being 'set apart' at ordination came to legitimate their authority both in the worshipping communities they were to serve, and in the new social horizons of society whose members were to be the recipients of their services as an organised body of religious professionals. A deliberate orientation to these new social horizons had been less necessary when church and society were more hierarchically ruled and the civil authority of the clergy and parish officers had not been weakened on the ground by the demise of the parish as a unit of local government, and the learned status of the clergy was not matched by the members of specialised professions. 'By the end of the 19th century the social function of clergy was that permitted by their ordination, not by their previously existing status as gentlemen.'²⁴

The clergy as an occupational group still largely conform to the professional form of their work that developed in the 19th century and which orientates them as an organised body to live territorially, housed in the benefice as a territorial unit in order to be available to members of society and not just to their congregations. Parochial clergy are deployed, housed and paid then by the church to face a wider society as well as the worshipping community. This placing of the clergy by the church in geographical territories in the nation, within plural and multicultural communities that have less need of their services or understanding of their role, can isolate the clergy occupationally. Lewis-Anthony relates this isolation to the general failure of the professional model for the clergy. Clergy did not develop group methods and bases for working in the way that doctors, solicitors, and accountancy firms did: 'The parson remained in solitary splendour.'²⁵ At the beginning of the 21st century, the Church of England has become less societal and more congregational in its focus and the wider society that the parochial clergy are still deployed to face and serve has less need of their services and is more indifferent to their roles. There is less call on the clergy for their pastoral offices and little need expressed for their civic presence. In such contexts, and in reduced numbers, when not directly engaged in religious or pastoral activities or attending to administrative or managerial duties, clergy can experience isolation in their ministries. This occupational isolation suggests a need for more opportunities for clergy to associate with each other for support and encouragement in their ministries. Individual ministerial reviews take place in my diocese (Southwark) on an annual basis, but I suggest that a continual process of reflection by clergy as groups in a context of prayer and mutual support should be a regular, ideally weekly, feature of the clergy's lives in urban areas. The clergy in my Deanery in Southwark all belong to clergy 'clusters' which meet to this end.

A sense of society in which clergy once occupied a significant place has largely disappeared in contemporary urban areas, which presents parochial clergy with the

²⁴ Lewis-Anthony, J, *If You Meet George Herbert on the Road Kill Him: Radically Re-thinking Priestly Ministry* (London: Mowbray, 2009), p.31.

²⁵ Ibid., p.34.

urgent question of what it is they now stand for. In describing the context of urban clergy in this way, I do not mean to suggest that clergy are no longer valued for their ministries, or do not experience fulfilment in their vocations, or are not generally hopeful about the future of religion. We are in a period in which the church appears to be regaining its confidence in a post-secular climate, even if historic churches experience numerical decline.²⁶ I am drawing attention to the loss of a social dimension to mainstream Anglican clerical ways of life, which once connected the church with a wider society and which is in danger of being forgotten in the shift in focus of many clergy's work today towards congregations, places of worship, and what pastoral opportunities remain. The regrowth of worshipping communities, important as this work is for the future of the church, is a focus of activity that can distract attention away from reflection on the church's uncertain social identity.

Ministerial reflections

How are the clergy to relate to a society in which their identity was once more embedded? The importance of this question emerges in Percy's observation that theological resources and processes of formation lack much tangible sense of their 'public or cultural resonance'.²⁷ The assumption that such a resonance is still largely intact can disable otherwise spirited and insightful reflections on ministry. John Pritchard's *The Life and Work of a Priest*,²⁸ for example, declares the social context and the clergy's more marginal place in it only late in his reflections on the priestly task, and yet the vigour of his presentation can have the effect of distracting attention from the social context of the clergy which is the constant locus of their work. There can be a short-lived comfort in such writing that quickly dissipates when the priest walks out into the multi-cultural streets of England's contemporary towns and cities. Such writing perhaps suggests that Taylor's 'post-Durkheimian' turn is the now normative starting point for ministerial reflection.

Anglican social horizons

The contraction and loss of a societal context for ministry is the implicit subject of Pridmore's reflections on ministry.²⁹ Pridmore, who spent all his ministry in inner-city east London writes: 'The stress which most inner-city clergy experience, and which some own up to, is not simply a consequence of overwork ... Conscientious clergy are overburdened more by the contradictions of their work than by its volume.' He goes on to suggest that at base this is connected to 'contemplating the gulf between the vision which once beckoned them to ministry and the prospect of what actually has to be done'.³⁰ The urban clergy I researched for this thesis agreed

²⁶ For a pessimistic interpretation of institutional decline, see, Brown, C, *The Death of Christian Britain: Understanding Secularisation 1800-2000*, (London: Routledge, 2001).

²⁷ Percy, M, *Clergy: Origin of a Species*, (London: Continuum, 2006), p.30.

²⁸ Pritchard, J, *The Life and Work of a Priest*, (London: SPCK, 2007), p.56.

²⁹ Pridmore, J, *The Inner City of God: The Diary of an East End Parson* (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2008).

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p.56.

that the biggest challenge facing them in their ministries was keeping their churches going.³¹ Congregational incapacity was the primary challenge, with fewer people, clerical colleagues, and financial resources to approach the task – ‘finding people with the appropriate skills to do stuff’, as one interviewee put it.³² Implicit in Pridmore’s reflections upon ‘the vision which once beckoned’ is a breakdown in the horizon of church and society that I have referred to and recognition of the material and social factors involved in sustaining the social vision of Anglican presence in the city. Pridmore suggests the deficit in the material and human resources for Anglican presence in the inner city as the primary pressure on inner-urban clergy. Although he does not explore this dimension directly, his book is implicitly all about their decay as institutional horizons locally inhabited as a way of life.

Symbolic violence

Pridmore observes that the stress for inner-urban clergy falls in the gap between vision and what has to be done. Institutional vistas in the inner city are the achievement in many places of fairly constant mental and practical effort on the clergy’s part, with reduced numbers and finance and people to share the work with. Such pressures and a geographical emplacement in which a sense of having somehow to relate to everything and everyone around you, which is the Anglican parochial legacy, can affect clergy in a manner similar to Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of symbolic violence. According to Bourdieu, symbolic violence occurs wherever there is an inappropriate fit between a habitus and a social field. Historical change or simply finding yourself in social situations where you simply do not have the various forms of capital needed to function effectively produces a form of suffering.

[Agents] unwittingly contribute to wielding the symbolic domination which is wielded upon them, that is upon their unconscious, inasmuch, and only inasmuch as-their mental structures are objectively in agreement with the social microcosm in which their specific interests are engendered and invested, in and through that very agreement.³³

Clergy can suffer from internalising symbolic parochial horizons from the past and trying to live them out socially as if there were still an ‘objective agreement’ between their mental structures and their parochial locations, which can lead to unnecessary forms of self-sacrifice. Sacrifice in serving a former vision of church and society that clergy have historically mediated and represented through their ministries, and which I am arguing has collapsed as a shared social imagination in urban and other areas.

³¹ Sichel, S, MFS, *‘London Citizens and London Clergy: Exploring the Influence of Community Organising on the Ministries of Clergy in London’*, King’s College, London, 2011.

³² Ibid., p.22.

³³ Bourdieu, P, *The State Nobility: Elite Schools in the Field of Power* (trans L.C. Clough) (Cambridge: Polity, 1996), p.4. See the discussion on symbolic violence in Michael Grenfell, ed. *Pierre Bourdieu: Key Concepts* (Durham: Acumen Publishing Limited, 2010), p.191.

Herbertism

A rejection of traditional social horizons of the church in society is the subject of Lewis-Anthony's discrediting of the legacy of George Herbert (1593-1633) in the Anglican priestly imagination.³⁴ Lewis-Anthony sees the social horizons of the clergy's work inspired by Herbert's pastoral legacy as an albatross around their necks:

The beauty of George Herbert's work, setting aside the beauty of his language, lies in the romanticism of his story ... his story is a triumph of the *mythos* of the Church of England, the story we tell ourselves, to root ourselves in the soil and the society of England, to show that, despite all the vicissitudes of the centuries, reformations, dissolutions, indolence, decays, revivals, disputes and decline, we are both *the* Church of England and the Church *of* England. This land is our land, and George Herbert is the guarantor of our title to it.³⁵

For Lewis-Anthony, clerical rules of life and more theologically disciplined horizons better honour the clergy's religious roles in the contemporary context, enabling new energies to be channelled into foundational priestly tasks. There is much in this work with which I agree, for example Lewis-Anthony's recognition that the inheritance of unrealistic pastoral horizons can be a source of self-inflicted clerical distress, which I have discussed in relation to Bourdieu's concept of symbolic violence. However, in rejecting unrealistic social horizons for the church and its clergy, Lewis-Anthony moves into a discursive defence of this refocusing of priestly ministry by way of the theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Rowan Williams.³⁶ There is much of worth in this retrieval of theological horizons for priestly ministry, but I question whether the change from a social ministry to a theological horizon actually addresses the deeper institutional problem of the church's actual social embedding that the book attempts only too personally and theologically readjust. Lewis-Anthony notes the political establishment of the Church of England's social horizons as a land church in the nation as integral to 'Herbertism', yet his move to more personal theological register leaves the social and political in these redrawn horizons vague and unclear. There is no discussion, for example, of how Bonhoeffer's communal conception of Christian life might come into renewed contact with the life of the parish church. Parochial social horizons may indeed need to be refocused and re-inhabited, a reorientation of which I would approve and in which I suggest the theological could become distinctive again, but the social and political dimensions of Herbert's legacy need a more careful discussion than Lewis-Anthony's rejection of 'Herbertism' allows for. For Lewis-Anthony, personal and subjective theological horizons of meaning replace institutionally mediated social horizons which require actual social relations as well as abstract theological horizons to adequately replace them. I interpret these social horizons more politically as the collapse of the church's place in society, which may be responsible for clergy's occupational stresses and illusions about the

³⁴ Lewis-Anthony, J, *If You Meet George Herbert on the Road Kill Him: Radically Re-thinking Priestly Ministry* (London: Mowbray, 2009).

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p.22.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.87-142.

social place of the church in society, but still retain an important dimension for the future of ministry that Lewis-Anthony appears to abandon.

The liberal settlement

Some commentators acknowledge social and political horizons as being integral to Anglican identity in society. Jenkins, a priest and anthropologist, has described the identity of the Church of England as a religious and political response to the failure of religion to cope with the social and political forces at large in the early modern period. He sees the Church of England religiously and socially as committed to the politics of a 'liberal settlement' in which there is 'an understanding which affirms the rightness of there being a plurality of viewpoints, which holds therefore with these viewpoints being embodied in a variety of institutions, and which is committed consequently to a view of the supreme value of politics, as the practice of achieving compromise between such institutions representing such a plurality of opinions'.³⁷ Jenkins sees all churches and social institutions in England as having had to recognise such a settlement, with some churches further than others from accepting their political relationship with the state, but still existing to a greater or lesser degree within the contours of this settlement.

Jenkins' defence of the liberal settlement defends a more communal view of the place of the church in society, an echo of an older sense of the church's place in a civil society, which I will discuss later, and in which the clergy are seen as part of a wider Clerisy in the cultural and intellectual life of the national community. However, there is something rather implausible about such a view within current religious, social, and political conditions, especially from an inner-urban perspective. Jenkins champions the church's place in a shared cultural and sociopolitical field in which institutions contribute to a sense of the practical and intellectual life of the whole. The difficulty with this picture is that in inner-urban areas, and no doubt in many others also, religious and other institutions lack a plausible sense of existing in such a liberal settlement as a social or political reality. It is hard to see any evidence of such a conversation between 'embedded institutions', which his vision commends. The institutional relationships and forums necessary for such a sense of embedding are remote, if they exist at all, from the conditions in which the church exists in our towns and cities. Institutions in urban areas often exist as islands with very little interaction between them. Schools are perhaps the one remaining area where something of this settlement plausibly remains for the Anglicans and Catholics on the ground, even in the inner city. Yet schools are so focussed on their own internal life and response to the demands of the state, and the churches so congregationally preoccupied that there is little time, energy, or place for the kind of sharing of viewpoints or sense of common life that Jenkins's view envisages as the historic and continuing cultural polity in his

³⁷ Jenkins, T, *An Experiment in Providence: How Faith engages with the World*, (London: SPCK, 2006), pp.25-26.

conception of church and society. Jenkin's defence of a liberal settlement is an important one, but in current religious, social and political conditions it stands politically defenceless.

Habermas's analysis of present institutional conditions under the influence of the market is more realistic:

In the welfare state democracies, politics [in which the church had some influence and institutional investment] was able to wield a steering influence on the diverging sub-systems and could still counterbalance tendencies towards social disintegration ... it could succeed in this effort within the framework of the nation state. Today under conditions of globalised capitalism, the political capacities for protecting social integration are becoming dangerously restricted.³⁸

Jenkins ends his essay with a call, 'In sum (and to oversimplify grossly): Up Church, bite clerisy! Clerisy bite nation! Nation, bite state! State gets over the stile, so we may all get home.'³⁹ The question this raises is from where the practical agency for such a ripple effect is expected to come, which is not a question that Jenkins addresses.

Social fragmentation

The Anglican clergy's place in and adaptation to society and state and its changes is, as Taylor's scheme suggests, a consequence of the Anglican church's historic role in the development of a society 'organised around God's design'.⁴⁰ Taylor's categories are, he acknowledges, 'ideal types'⁴¹ and for that reason perhaps do not adequately account for the oddness of Anglican identity as a church in society in which elements of each of his Durkheimian forms can still be said to persist. He suggests, for example, that in Catholic societies, 'the old model of presence lasted much longer'⁴² and I would argue that a sense of embodied sacred and secular social presence has persisted within the Church of England until the present day. We can point to one historical reason for this persistence in the structural form of the Church of England.

The Church of England is categorised by Taylor as a neo-Durkheimian Protestant church that retains some Catholic 'ceremonial' trimmings.⁴³ However this overlooks the fact that, as a polity, the Church of England has retained its ancient Catholic ecclesial form in the transition to neo-Durkheimian political conditions. The parish,

³⁸ Habermas, J, 'The Political', in, Mendieta, E, and Vanantwerpen, J, eds. *The Power of Religion in the Public Square* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), p.15.

³⁹ Jenkins, T, *An Experiment in Providence: How Faith Engages with the World* (London: SPCK, 2006), p.28.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p.76.

⁴¹ Ibid., p.97.

⁴² Taylor, C, *Varieties of Religion Today* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2002), p.70. A recent argument for a continuation of this 'model of presence', of the *Corpus Mysticum*, long after the Reformation in 'Protestant' England, is made in, Jennifer R. Rust, *The Body in Mystery: The Political Theology of the Corpus Mysticum in the Literature of Reformation England* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2014).

⁴³ Taylor, C, *Varieties of Religion Today* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2002), p.75.

for example, as a territorial unit of an episcopal diocesan structure, emerged well before the Reformation and survived it. Despite the transfer of political sovereignty over church and society from Pope to monarch and parliament in the Elizabethan Settlement, the Church of England has retained some leeway in its social horizons maintained by the ecclesial form of its polity. This has enabled the church to retain a limited degree of autonomy in its social relations with a wider society and state. That the church might have its own social horizons reproduced by the continuance of pre-reformation institutional and liturgical practices parochially is a perspective never entirely lost from the Church of England's existence.

Civil Society

The church that developed in England from the Elizabethan Settlement was a church bound to a political social order. The church's social horizons, however, were not identical to the horizons of society, in the sense of them described by Williams⁴⁴ and which I have discussed in terms of their fragmentation in the analysis of Taylor. The social horizons of the first few centuries of the Church of England's life were exercised within a conception of a national civil society, rather than in relation to the more flattened and extended, plural and abstract sense of society with which we are more familiar today. Harris clarifies this distinction between church and society in an older conception of civil society, and church and society in modern society:

Throughout early modern Europe the idea of 'civil society' meaning a collective public identity shaped by shared political and legal institutions, long preceded any conception of 'society' in the modern sense, as a totality of self-sustaining social relationships distinct from any such politico-legal framework: indeed the very idea of any such extra-political totality was scarcely thought of anywhere prior to the 18th century.⁴⁵

Harris's distinction between civil society and society distinguishes the latter by the absence of politics. Political governance and law are absent from the conception of society that we are sociologically familiar with and which Harris suggests only developed from the 18th century. The Anglican Richard Hooker (1563-1600) first used and expounded the term 'civil society' in England.⁴⁶ Hooker was referring to a group of governing institutions which exercised authority over the territory of a national community. Hooker's thinking of civil society is influenced by Aquinas and late-medieval conciliar thought. Harris notes that Hooker uses the term civil society, interchangeably with 'politique society', 'publique society' and 'civil regiment'.⁴⁷ Hooker's view of civil society is a vision of a lawful and publicly ordered nation in which the church is a central institution for all the people of England. A civil society

⁴⁴ Williams, R, *The Long Revolution* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1961), pp.101-102.

⁴⁵ Harris, J, 'Richard Hooker to Harold Laski: Changing Perceptions of Civil Society in British Political Thought, Late Sixteenth to Early Twentieth Centuries', in, Harris, J, ed., *Civil Society in British History: Ideas, Identities, Institutions* (Oxford: OUP, 2005), p.16.

⁴⁶ Hooker, R, *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity, Book 1* (1593) in Folger Library Edition of Speed Hill, W, ed., *The Works of Richard Hooker* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 1977), Vol.1.

⁴⁷ Harris, J, 'Richard Hooker to Harold Laski: Changing Perceptions of Civil Society in British Political Thought, Late Sixteenth to Early Twentieth Centuries', in, Harris, J, ed., *Civil Society in British History: Ideas, Identities, Institutions* (Oxford: OUP, 2005), p.16.

for Hooker is not a natural society but rather one established by the reasonable consent of those who lived in it. Those living in a natural society agree reasonably to transfer their needs for security, the judgement of disputes, material prosperity, and the furtherance of 'sociability' to a civil society.⁴⁸ Although we might seriously question how this consent was achieved, Hooker's acknowledgement of the importance of consent was to prove important in later debates about the legitimacy of political regimes. The laws of a civil society required an executive, but the power to make laws belonged to 'the same entire societies'.⁴⁹ Civil societies in Hooker's view could be secular as well as religious, and although he was writing about civil society in a national community, Harris notes his internationalist dimensions:

As a remedy for contention over 'polity, order, and regiment in the church' he recommended a revival of the 'general councils' of churches throughout Christendom that had lapsed since the later middle-ages. And his account of secular civil society likewise stressed the advantages of sociability, not just between neighbours and fellow-countrymen, but in the form of 'courteous entertainment of foreigners and strangers', 'commerce between grand societies', 'a kind of mutual society and fellowship even with all mankind', and a citizenship 'not of this or that commonwealth, but of the world'.⁵⁰

In Hooker's vision of the Anglican *via media* in a civil society, Allchin sees an integrating perspective which attempts to hold together things that are different; he sees in it a patristic vision 'of conjunction and participation'.⁵¹ This was a platonic and hierarchical conception of how church and society participate in each other under a monarchical state, but in this vision how people associate with each other and the wider abstraction of civil society are perceived and conceived together. Hooker's near contemporary John Donne expresses a similar yet more deeply communal and social vision of society, in which sight of actual human associations and a wider imagination of a relational theological whole are mutually reinforcing in his picture of the world as one parish:

God himself would admit a figure of society, as there is a plurality of persons in God, though there be but one God; and all his external actions testify a love of society and communion. In heaven there are orders of angels, and armies of martyrs, and in that house many mansions; on earth families, cities, churches, colleges, all plural things; and lest either of these be not company enough alone, there is an association of both, a communion of saints which makes the militant and triumphant church one parish.⁵²

It might be suggested that something of the divine in Hooker and Donne's conceptions of church and society abides even within the avowedly secular terms

⁴⁸ Hooker, R, *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity, Book 1* (1593), in Folger Library Edition of Speed Hill, W, ed., *The Works of Richard Hooker* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 1977), Vol.1, pp.95-103.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, pp.98-100.

⁵⁰ Harris, J, 'Richard Hooker to Harold Laski: Changing Perceptions of Civil Society in British Political Thought, Late Sixteenth to Early Twentieth Centuries', in, Harris, J, ed., *Civil Society in British History: Ideas, Identities, Institutions* (Oxford: OUP, 2005), p.17.

⁵¹ Allchin, A, *Participation in God: A Forgotten Strand in Anglican Tradition* (London: DLT, 1988), p.9.

⁵² Donne, J, 'Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions' (1624), in Mueller, J, ed., *John Donne* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), p.246.

within which civil society is usually discussed today. Logan, commenting on Gellner's discussion of civil society, notes that he attributes its emergence to 'a combination of historical factors', yet he regards it nonetheless as a 'mystery and a miracle'.⁵³ The hierarchical integrity of Hooker's vision of a national civil society in which the church participated was to be undone by dissenting forces in church and nation and later by the rise of an urban and industrial society. A sacred and secular vision of Hooker's communal conception of society, however, as we have seen in Jenkins' vision of the liberal settlement, has never been entirely extinguished from the Anglican theopolitical imagination.

The political horizons of the clergy

The duties of the clergy of the Anglican polity were civic as well as religious in scope. The role of the clergy in a national civil society was to mediate a religious and political authority territorially through the parishes. Today we are not used to thinking of the Anglican clergy as having a political function, yet this was crucial to their historic identity in a church that was a civil power. The political role of the Anglican clergy has meant that their pastoral work of spiritual care and in the meeting of human need has traditionally included a political dimension of oversight and involvement in local governance. As Pattison notes, the traditional pastoral work of the Anglican clergy was an 'overtly political activity'.⁵⁴ The contemporary understanding of pastoral ministry and care in the Anglican tradition is usually forgetful of these secular, civic, and political dimensions of religious horizons, normative to clerical practice until the late 19th century. Before the 20th century, Anglican pastoral ministry in a parochial system of local governance was integral to clerical identity. Pattison describes this politics as disciplinary in nature. He reminds us that George Herbert's *The Country Parson*⁵⁵ has a chapter 'devoted to The Parson Punishing!'.⁵⁶ and suggests that in Herbert's book 'surveillance and control are to be found throughout'.⁵⁷ Pattison reminds us that 18th and 19th-century Anglican clergy, 'apart from their liturgical and preaching roles ... acted as officers of law and order, almoners, teachers, officers of health, as magistrates and as active politicians ...'.⁵⁸ A perception of the continuing authority of the Church of England's parochial presence, a strong echo perhaps of Hooker's view of their place in a 'civil regiment', is found in the radical William Cobbett's observation in 1802:

The clergy are less powerful from their rank and industry than from their *locality*. They are from necessity, *everywhere*; and their aggregate influence is astonishingly great. When from the top of any high hill, one looks around the country, and sees the multitude of regularly distributed spires, one not

⁵³ Pat Logan reflecting on Ernest Gellner's assessment of the origins of civil society, see Logan, P, *A World Transformed: When Hopes Collapse and Faith's Collide* (London: Churches Together in Britain and Ireland, 2007), p.70; Gellner, E, *Conditions of Liberty: Civil Society and its Rivals* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1994).

⁵⁴ Pattison, S, *A Critique of Pastoral Care* (London: SCM Press, 1993), p.94.

⁵⁵ Herbert, G, *The Country Parson and Selected Poems* (London: SCM Press, 1956).

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p.61.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p.61.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p.94.

only ceases to wonder that order and religion are maintained, but one is astonished that any such thing as irreligion should prevail. It is the equal distribution of the clergy, there being in every corner of the kingdom, that makes them a powerful and formidable corps.⁵⁹

Cobbett perceives that it is the clergy's local presence everywhere in a national civil society which makes their 'aggregate influence ... astonishingly great'. Speaking of the legal duties of parish vestries in the 1830s, Sidney and Beatrice Webb describe:

... burial grounds, parish cottages and work houses, their common lands and endowed charities, their market crosses, pumps, pounds, whipping posts, stocks, cages, watch houses, weights and scales, clocks and fire engines ... The keeping of the peace, the suppression of vagrancy, the relief of destitution, the mending of roads, the suppression of nuisances, the destruction of vermin, the furnishing of soldiers and sailors ... the enforcement of religious and moral discipline. These ... duties were imposed on the parish and its officers, the vestry and its organisation by the law of the land.⁶⁰

These examples draw attention to the importance of the parish and its officers in the local government of England prior to the 20th century. As the Webbs put it, 'The parish was a many-sided instrument by which the National Government and the Established Church sought to arrange for the due performance of such collective regulations and common services as were deemed necessary to the welfare of the state.'⁶¹ The question before us is what happened to these parochial and political horizons in the 20th century.

Society and state in the political horizons of the 20th-century Church of England

Social and political developments of society and state in the 19th and 20th centuries marked a major transition in the social horizons of the Church of England within society. As well as the movement towards a professionalisation of the clergy and the new importance of these horizons in an industrial and urban age, as previously noted, these professional horizons in the newly emerging sense of society marked the beginning of the disappearance of a local and political dimension to the church's ministry, which had been integral to their parochial horizons as representatives of national religious and political elites. As a more contemporary sense of society emerged and the clergy adapted and became a more secularly influenced profession, the church's social horizons migrated from the practical realm of pastoral and political authority in a conception of the parish and its officers as a local unit of governance, to a more ideal location within the horizons of an increasingly powerful, secular, and centralised state. The state's political horizons in society came to assume a larger and more determinative place within the church's horizons within a national community. This process culminated in the support and transfer of assets,

⁵⁹ William Cobbett to William Windham, quoted in, Gregory, J, and Chamberlain, J, eds., *The National Church in Local Perspective: the Church of England in The Regions, 1660-1800* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2003), p.1.

⁶⁰ Webb, S and B, *English Local Government from the Revolution to the Municipal Corporations Act: the parish and the county* (London: Longman's, Green & Co, 1906), p.4.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p.40.

hospitals and schools, for example from the church to the state in the creation of a welfare state after the Second World War.

According to the Webbs, in the 1830s the powers of the parishes of England in taxation and spending ‘outweighed all other local governing authorities’, spending ‘not only more than all the other local bodies put together, but not far short of one-fifth of the budget of the national government itself’.⁶² From the 1830s, the power of the parish ebbed away, initially outside the metropolitan areas, through government legislation that allowed for local authorities to be set up outside parish jurisdictions, and most importantly by the loss of the local tax-raising powers of the parish through the Poor Rate, following the Poor Law Amendment Act 1834, and later a Church Rate abolished in 1864, both of which ‘laid an axe to the root of the most important trunk of the parish structure’.⁶³ Metropolitan parish vestries lasted longer but were eventually dissolved by the Local Government Act 1894. In the course of these developments, what disappeared from the social horizons of the Church of England were the political dimensions of a national church anchored in a national system of local civic governance. For William Temple, the most influential Anglican social thinker of the 20th century, who had a strong conception of an ‘interlocking of church and state’,⁶⁴ the character of the church as itself a social and political body in society disappeared. As Wannenwetsch notes, ‘As a political commonwealth, the church does not appear in Temple at all.’⁶⁵ What Wannenwetsch spots in his analysis of Temple’s highly influential social thought is its impoverished ecclesiology.⁶⁶ Temple’s philosophical theology conditions his vision of church and society. Church and society are an ontological totality mediated through the principles of reason. The Church of England is established as an institution in a societal field in which the life of the church only intrudes upon social and political issues at the point of a principle in reasoned debate, and as a contribution to the overall effort of an improved societal whole:

The church must announce Christian principles and point out where the existing social order at any time is in conflict with them. It must then pass on to Christian Citizens, acting in their civic capacity, the task of reshaping the existing order in closer conformity to the principles. For at this point technical knowledge may be required and judgements of practical expediency are always required.⁶⁷

As Wannenwetsch notes, for Temple, ‘The church is not social or political prior to the enunciation of principles in political and economic debates whose reason and

⁶² Webb, S and B, *English Local Government from the Revolution to the Municipal Corporations Act: the parish and the county* (London: Longman’s, Green & Co, 1906), p.4.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p.40.

⁶⁴ Temple, W, *Citizen and Churchman* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1941), p.59.

⁶⁵ Wannenwetsch, B, *Political Worship* (Oxford: OUP, 2004), p.99.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 91-101.

⁶⁷ Temple, W, *Christianity and Social Order*, 1942, reissued with an introduction by Ronald H. Preston (New York: 1977), p. 58.

social organisation is not that of the church.’⁶⁸ In such a view, the church at worship is not a context in which lives are capable of being transformed and redirected socially and politically but rather occasions at which a principle quite capable of being discovered elsewhere is simply celebrated.

Welfare utopianism⁶⁹

A recent study of the changing place of religion in society sees this transition in the social horizons of the Church of England to a place within the horizons of an overarching state, at high tide in the post-war decades of welfare, as amounting to an ‘ideology’.⁷⁰ The introduction to this study describes this ideology as one in which Britain would be ‘a secure and civilized haven’. It was to be ‘a one-nation solution in which government, industry and the public would achieve harmonious consensus ... brought about by peaceful cooperation and rational planning, not by divine intervention or coercive measures’.⁷¹ This study argues that the ‘welfare ideal’ was a societal horizon within which, although it became increasingly secularised, the post-war churches pastoral and political interests were deeply invested in the latter half of the 20th century.

In this account, religion, still predominantly Christian in the immediate post-war years, was significantly shaped in its social dimensions by its relation to the development of the welfare state in a liberalising society in which there was a strong secularisation thesis (that religion was inevitably dying out). In other words, the social horizons of the Church of England – a sense of its place in society – found refuge amidst institutional decline in a liberalising and secularising society of which it was less socially, religiously and politically representative, through an identification with the state’s political project of welfare as a point of convergence with its own religious horizons in society and state.⁷² In Woodhead’s view, the welfare state amounted to ‘a civil religion’⁷³ in which the pastoral activity of the churches was seen as complementing the work of a pastoral state.

Religion and Change in Modern Britain suggests that this has given way to a more ambivalent role for the Church of England in relation to the state, which since the mid-1970s has orientated its interests away from the pastoral horizons of welfare and towards the values of the market.⁷⁴ In this study, Chapman identifies the church’s support for the ‘Social God’ of the welfare decades and sees the last flourish of this ‘secularising movement’ as the market culture began its ascent, in the publication of

⁶⁸ Ibid., p.96.

⁶⁹ Woodhead, L, and Catto, R, eds., *Religion and Change in Modern Britain* (Milton Keynes: Routledge, 2012), p.11.

⁷⁰ Ibid., p.10.

⁷¹ Ibid., p.10.

⁷² For an account of the ‘Welfare God’, see Nicholls, D, *Deity and Domination: Images of God in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (London: RKP, 1989).

⁷³ Woodhead, L, and Catto, R, eds., *Religion and Change in Modern Britain* (Milton Keynes: Routledge, 2012), p.10.

⁷⁴ Ibid., pp.14-20.

Faith in the City in 1985.⁷⁵ As Chapman describes it, *Faith in the City* ‘represented a last assertion of the idea of the Church of England as the focus of a ‘one-nation ethos with the church as the somewhat paternalistic moral centre of a benevolent welfare state’.⁷⁶ The break-up of a consensus in the politics of the state, as it turned away from the pastoral horizons of welfare towards an emphasis on the wealth creation of the market, has created particular challenges for the Church of England. The Church’s governing institutional culture shared the pastoral values and ambitions of the state in the post-war decades of welfare and has not yet worked out its attitude towards the state’s promotion of the role of the market.

Woodhead and Catto’s study of religion in Britain helpfully describes the social horizons in which the church and its clergy existed more securely as a professional part of society and state in the post-war decades. However, while agreeing with this study’s emphasis on the importance of the political ideal of welfare in the social horizons of the Church of England in the post-war decades, I suggest that these developments in the case of the Church of England can also be read inversely as a process of practical depoliticisation in the social horizons of a national church. The church’s re-orientation of its social presence nationally within the authoritative horizons of a welfare state can be perceived as a process that went hand in hand with the loss of a political role for the church in a parochially based civil society. We might ask why the state’s pastoral role in society should be regarded as so significant for the horizons of the church as a body in society. I suggest this is because the church in this process is relying on the political form of its social horizons as part of the body politic of the state to bolster its ecclesial horizons in society as a social and pastoral and not just a religious body. The political horizons of the welfare state in society compensate for the hollowing out of its local presence as a pastoral and political body in society. The state’s enlarged role and agency in society anchor and enable the church’s own pastoral and political horizons as an imaginative body in society at the same time as these have practically declined. The Webbs’ description of the social powers of vestries and parish officers in the early 19th century are incrementally transposed to the agency of the state as the states pastoral horizons gather momentum in the 20th century.

The rising support for a greater role for the state in the early 20th century was in fact at first accompanied by an insistence, intellectually defended, of the continued importance of local voluntary action to exist in tandem with support for greater state provision. T. H. Green, an influential teacher of the generation that went on to lay the foundations of the welfare state, saw local voluntary action and civic engagement as religious obligations in the ‘institutions and processes of the body

⁷⁵ Chapman, M, et al., ‘*God-Change*’, in Woodhead, L, and Catto, R, eds., *Religion and Change in Modern Britain*, (Milton Keynes: Routledge, 2012), p.179; *Faith in the City: A Call for Action by Church and Nation*, Archbishop’s Commission on Urban Priority Areas, Church House Publishing, 1985.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p.178.

politic'.⁷⁷ Such a perspective saw no conflict in promoting a greater role for the state in society and the church's place in the state as a source of voluntary effort.⁷⁸ Woodhead, following Prochaska's study of the extent of voluntary effort in 19th and early-20th-century church in England, suggests that a welfare orthodoxy came to prevail in the decades of a welfare state, in which the belief that 'a universal system of centrally controlled welfare must replace an army of volunteers co-ordinated by a plethora of independent bodies'.⁷⁹ In an age of state-centred welfare, local control and voluntary effort came to be seen as marginal and insignificant rather than as a complementary mode of pastoral activity in society.

New sovereignty and lost public presence

As *Religion and Change in Modern Britain* argues, the place of the church in a market-driven state rather than a welfare state presents the contemporary church with some confusion about its social and political identity. The Anglican Bishop Peter Selby, a seasoned commentator on pastoral and political issues in the public life of the church, has outlined the contours of the challenges that now face the exposed social landscape of the Church of England under the new dispensation of the market.⁸⁰ Selby argues that the rise of the market changes the Church of England's traditional relationship to sovereignty. Under the dominance of the market the church is relocated in its relation to traditional sources of sovereign power in monarch and parliament. Selby asks whether the Church of England is now established in relation to sovereign power or to those who are the victims of that power: 'In those situations where a choice has to be made between the claims of the powerful and the claims of the excluded, where is the church located?'⁸¹ Selby argues that the Church of England's involvement with sovereignty 'is with sovereignty as it was, not with sovereignty as it is', that is, as it now exists under the market where the church faces the power of money beyond the control of the nation state. The current position of the Church of England is described by Selby as 'mis-established'. He goes on to say that under the conditions of market sovereignty, in which the markets effectively decide who is to be included and who is not, the church can be seen:

... as lacking both the determination or the skills to engage those who operate in the globalised financial market place ... To remedy that is to embark on the reform of our discipleship, always a

⁷⁷ Harris, J, 'From Richard Hooker to Harold Laski: Changing perceptions of Civil Society in British Political Thought, Late Sixteenth to Early Twentieth Centuries', Harris, J, ed., *Civil Society in British History* (Oxford: OUP, 2003), p.29.

⁷⁸ For the extent and importance of the church's involvement in voluntary activity in the 19th and early 20th centuries, see Prochaska, F, *Christianity and Social Service in Modern Britain* (Oxford: OUP, 2006).

⁷⁹ Woodhead, L, and Catto, R, eds., *Religion and Change in Modern Britain*, (Milton Keynes: Routledge, 2012), p.16.

⁸⁰ Selby, P, 'MIS-ESTABLISHMENT, Locating, and re-locating, the Church of England', The Twenty-seventh Eric Symes Abbott Memorial Lecture, 2012, published by the Dean's Office, Kings College London.

⁸¹ Ibid., p.4.

more challenging and demanding task than debating or even executing changes in our institutional arrangements.⁸²

Selby registers the challenges that economic and political change now present the church with under the sovereignty of the market and after the age of welfare. The leadership of the Church of England more widely has, however, been generally slow to register the impact of these changes on the social horizons of the church. The Church of England has become less visible as a public body in society. Evidence for the less visible and public place of the church as a social body in the eyes of the state can be deduced from a report published by the Church of England in 2008.⁸³ This report states that the Government had considerable data on religious activity in Britain (in the climate of the War on Terror) and no evidence base at all on the Church of England. This was interpreted by the authors of the report as an example of the church being misunderstood by government.⁸⁴ It is more likely that this omission reflected a situation in which the church has simply become of little interest in the eyes of governing elites, rather than in any misunderstanding, which rather suggests that an understanding of the church's place in the nation remains a contemporary feature of the governing mind.

This growing invisibility of the Church of England in public perception was confirmed by Sampson in what was to be his last *Anatomy of Britain* when he declared that 'Archbishops and the clergy have almost vanished from the political scene'.⁸⁵ My point here is that it is the moral and political dimensions of the church's horizons as a social body in society which have suffered most in the state's shift away from the horizons of welfare in society towards the wealth-creating energies of the market. The Church of England as an institution in society has historically mediated a horizon of society as a sacred and secular social whole. It could do this with more confidence when the state looked at society in the same way as the moral horizon of its care and concern. This horizon of the church in society is no longer shared by the state and thus the church's social horizons in society have become less visible.

At this point, I want to return briefly to parochial horizons that re-emerge in their vulnerability for clergy and laity now the church has a more ambivalent relation to society and state.

⁸² Ibid., p.5.

⁸³ Davis, F, et al, *Moral, But No Compass, Government, Church and the Future of Welfare, A Report for the Church of England and to the Nation*, Von Hugel Institute, St Edmund's College, Cambridge, (Chelmsford: Matthew James Publishing Ltd, 2008).

⁸⁴ Ibid., p.95.

⁸⁵ Sampson, A, *Who Runs This Place? The Anatomy of Britain in the 21st Century*. (London: John Murray, 2004), p.360.

The dismembered parish in a market-driven society

In *The New Catholicity*, the contextual theologian Robert Schreiter describes the effects of globalisation on local contexts.⁸⁶ Schreiter's discussion of how the globalisation of social conditions under the market changes context is useful in exploring the micro-level of parochial social conditions. Schreiter begins by noting that globalisation manifests itself firstly in an increasingly deterritorialised understanding of context itself.⁸⁷ Space is compressed in the city in such a way that:

Boundaries today are not boundaries of territory, but boundaries of difference. These boundaries intersect and crisscross in often bewildering fashion ... Seen from a territorial centre, a boundary of territory indicates where territory ends; it is a horizon. A boundary of difference highlights issues of difference rather than elements of commonality as the basis for identity.⁸⁸

Secondly, context becomes hyper-differentiated. 'The compression of time, the world of cyberspace, and the movement of peoples means that people are now participating in different realities at the same time, there is multiple belonging ... [And] people struggle to find a way of dealing with a variety of cultures, or fragments of cultures, occupying the same space.'⁸⁹ Thirdly, context becomes 'more clearly hybridised'. 'The purity of culture was probably always more of an aspiration than a reality, but in a globalised world it becomes increasingly untenable as a concept ... intense interaction destabilises once tranquil conditions ... the response is always inevitably hybrid.'⁹⁰ Schreiter's outline of the effects of globalisation on context is persuasive in illuminating the social experience of parish ministry in inner-urban areas today. Indeed the loss of purity in cultural horizons that Schreiter describes can be seen as similar to my own claim of a breakdown of church and society as a plausible conception of parochial life in the inner city.

Anglican parochial horizons, represented by the clergy, have been historically centred horizons, liturgically and geographically embedded, which under the pressure of globalised social conditions have become hollowed out and deterritorialised. The disappearance of common horizons in urban areas, in which individuals increasingly have a sense of 'multiple belonging', suggests that the task of sustaining communal forms of life will see the need for institutionally centred and embedded horizons to be accompanied by a perception of the importance of the encounter between differences as a now necessary grounds for the sustaining of common forms of life, now the societal and political containers of the institutions of church and state have been dissolved.

⁸⁶ Schreiter, R. J, *The New Catholicity: Theology between the Global and the Local* (New York: Orbis Books, 1997).

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.26-27.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p.26.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p.26.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.27.

Agamben reminds us that the word parish originally meant ‘the sojourn of a foreigner’⁹¹ and referred to the messianic time of the church, which was distinct from the time of the citizen in the state. Agamben argues that the Christian community has ceased to *parokein* – ‘sojourn like a foreigner’ – and instead ‘functions like any other worldly institution’ in the time of society and the state.⁹² Perhaps as contemporary clergy and laity in inner-city parishes look around them and observe that our differences are what we most often seem to have in common, we might hope for a recovery of the parochial as the time and place of dwelling hopefully amongst differences, amongst foreigners, strangers, beside (*para*), the house (*oikos*) of God, and see afresh the political conditions and possibilities of the pilgrim people of God.

Conclusion

I began this chapter by claiming that Raymond Williams’ conception of ‘actual relationships’ and the wider abstraction of society was a horizon that had broken down in the conditions in which the church today finds itself in inner-urban neighbourhoods. For Williams, a changing understanding of society requires a plausible relationship between human relationships and the wider abstractions of society as a whole. The plausibility of these relations was provided by the close intertwining of religious and political authority in the parochial governance of society in the Church of England before the mid-19th century. In the 20th century, actual relations and the wider abstraction of a society under the power and influence of a pastoral state substitute and distract attention away from the loss of the church’s substantive political horizons as a body in society as a whole.

I have explored the fragmentation of a sense of such a whole in the contemporary parish in multicultural areas through Taylor’s analysis of the changing place of religion in society. My claim of a breakdown in relations and abstractions in the mediating role of society in the church’s horizons in the state is supported by Taylor’s argument that belonging neither to a wider church or state conditions religious and social identity normatively in contemporary society. I have detected anxieties about Anglican social horizons as appearing implicitly or explicitly in some recent Anglican pastoral reflections and social commentary, in which the consequences of living in the fragmented horizons of society under the influence of the market impacts the church and clergy’s horizons at parochial and other levels. I have shown that the horizons of the Anglican Church in society were traditionally the political horizons of the church as a parochial civil power in society. I have questioned what happened to the political dimension of this presence, and suggested that Woodhead and Catto’s portrayal of the importance of the state’s welfare project to the church’s horizons as a body in society in the 20th century can also be said to

⁹¹ Agamben, G, *The Church and the Kingdom* (London, New York, Calcutta: Seagull Books, 2012), p.2.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p.4.

have been a development in which there was a practical depoliticisation, or political disembodiment, of the church as a civic as well as religious body in society.

What if the Church of England's traditional identity as a religious and political body in society could be re-inhabited within the reduced, yet still extensive, scale of its life as a national institution? Might an older conception of the Church of England as a theological and political church prove capable of some institutional re-interpretation in contemporary social, religious, and political conditions? Could the Church of England, acting ecumenically, reframe its institutional horizons socially and politically? The next chapter gives a history of a politics in which such prospects and questions have come into view, and which has been discovered in recent years by a number of parishes, Anglican and Catholic, in London and other cities in England, along with members of other churches and communities of faith. In this chapter I have begun to answer my research question about what the urban church could learn from community organising. My own experience and previous research have suggested that an engagement in the politics of community organising can alter the way in which social and political realms are experienced and perceived by the members of churches and other religious and secular institutions. My discussion of context and my use of pastoral reflection and social and political commentary in this chapter to illuminate the conditions of Anglican parochial ministry in inner-urban areas today has been a reflective process, itself assisted by the standpoint opened up by the politics of community organising. A social space has emerged in which dimensions of the church life, alongside other groups, can be practised, thought, and imagined differently. This is the first lesson that the church can learn from community organising. The destabilisation of social conditions and the fragmentation of societal horizons, described on a conceptual level in Taylor's analysis, have become visible and seen as capable of some repair in social terms through the experience of a communal form of politics. In a sense this chapter has been a lament for the decayed condition of parochial ministry and the negative condition of the church's residual place in a society. This has of course been a long historical process and we should not think that the social and political conditions of Anglicanism have ever been untroubled, yet the negative work of this chapter has been a necessary clearing of the ground in order to make way for the presentation of a new politics. This, I claim, has the capacity to help the church act faithfully in the midst of fragmented and plural social conditions and restore some voice, hearing, and sight, to its life as a body.

Chapter Two:

Community Organising in the United States and in England

The exercise of the virtues is itself apt to require a highly determinate attitude towards social and political issues; and it is always within some particular community with its own specific institutional forms that we learn or fail to learn the exercise of the virtues.

Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*.⁹³

This chapter provides a history of community organising as a politics that can enable a new perception of social and political horizons for the church. Such a change of standpoint requires that I introduce it by employing a more descriptive mode of writing.

At 6pm on Wednesday 29th January 2014, a group of adults⁹⁴ from institutions belonging to the London Citizens network in Lambeth, south London, gathered in the church of St Matthews in Brixton. Sitting in front of the altar we talked through our plans for the evening together. For some months we had been involved in encouraging the local authority to inhibit the activities of pay-day lenders in our borough. We had researched the companies, visited local loan shops to find out about their practices, and to make them aware of the restrictions on the operations of similar lenders in parent companies in the United States and especially Canada. On Canada Day we visited the shops with gifts of maple syrup for their staff and waved Canadian flags. We had advertised the local Credit Union in the high street and in our congregations and were seeking closer cooperation with the council in their efforts to counteract the appeal of loan shops to a clientele who, we had noticed, were at the same time sometimes to be found in the queue for our local Food Bank.

Tonight we were to address Lambeth Council at their meeting in the Town Hall across the road from the church. In conversations with the council over restrictions to the activities of pay-day lending in the borough, we had been frustrated by the

⁹³ MacIntyre, A, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 2nd ed. (London: Duckworth, 1990), pp.193-194.

⁹⁴ Sandra Layne, St Matthews C of E, Brixton; Fr Peter Milligan, St John's C of E, Angell Town; Barbara Wilson, Corpus Christi RC, Brixton Hill; Esmat Jeraz, Hyderi Islamic Centre; Jeremy Martin, St John the Divine C of E, Kennington; Selina Stone, Organiser for 'Just Money'; Eric Obeng, House of Faith, West Norwood; Margaret Novakovic, Corpus Christi RC, Brixton Hill; Rev. Stephen Sichel, St Matthew's C of E, Brixton; Jane Bevis, St John the Divine C of E, Kennington; Esme McKay, Corpus Christi RC, Brixton Hill; Joe Egerton, Corpus Christi RC, Brixton Hill; Tom Chigbo, Organiser, London Citizens.

failure of a council cabinet member to meet with us, despite the Council Leader's personal promise that this would happen. The council thought that tonight we were to address them to reiterate our concerns about the activities of pay-day lending in the borough, an issue they were themselves concerned about. Our own hopes for the meeting were in fact slightly different. We sought a public commitment by a cabinet member to meet with us at a future date to discuss the council's attempts to curb pay-day lending in the borough.

We had chosen Eric Obeng, a member of House of Faith, a Ghanaian Pentecostal church in West Norwood, to lead our deputation. Eric was nervous. Gripping the speech he was to give to the council tightly in his hands, he practised looking up and raising his voice as we rehearsed in the church.

We had been asked to arrive at the Town Hall by 6.30pm, so we left the church in good time, agreeing as we crossed the road, to meet afterwards back at the church to reflect on how the evening had gone. As we approached the Town Hall we heard the shouts of a crowd on the pavement waving placards who had come to protest a wave of evictions from council properties. Inside the council building we were shown into an ante-room where we met two other deputations who were also to address the council. We waited for 45 minutes before being escorted to a bench outside the council chamber. We were then sent back to the waiting room as the meeting was briefly adjourned in order that the public gallery could be cleared following some disruptive behaviour. Finally, our deputation was escorted into the council chamber where we took our allotted seats and Eric was called to the stand.

Eric had overcome his nerves and began his address confidently and clearly. He praised the council for the work they had been doing around pay-day lending, noted the meetings we had had with a council employee, who was also interested in furthering the council's work on the issue, and clearly asked for a meeting between our group and councillor McGlone, the chair of the council's finance committee, to further work on the issue. Eric ended his speech by thanking the council for the opportunity to address them. When Eric had finished, our deputation broke into applause, which was echoed in the public gallery and then rippled through the council chamber. Councillor McGlone then got to his feet, reassured us of the council's desire to further progress on pay-day lending and agreed to meet with us to discuss the situation. We left the council chamber in high spirits and returned to the church to review what had happened, reflect on what we had learnt, and to think about our next steps on the issue. We congratulated Eric's leadership in the action.⁹⁵

What we were doing that evening is of interest in an Anglican historical perspective. The old parish of Lambeth had become part of the County of London in 1889, and a

⁹⁵ This action led to an invitation by the council to work on its Financial Resilience Strategy, the council's attempt to ameliorate the impact of government cuts to welfare services. Citizens in south London has been active since 2004 and the local council have come to respect working with us. We are flattered, but mindful of the importance of maintaining our independence.

metropolitan borough in 1900, following the enactment of the Local Government Act of 1889, in which 28 metropolitan boroughs replaced 41 parish vestries. The old Vestry Hall for Lambeth, at Kennington Green, was replaced by Lambeth Town Hall in Brixton in 1908. Thus Anglicans, having withdrawn from civic governance in the 19th century, could be said to have reappeared politically, as part of a broad ecumenical alliance, at that meeting in Lambeth Town Hall in 2014.

Outline of the chapter

In this chapter I give an account of how community organising emerged in 1930s Chicago and its development and history in the United States. A history is necessary at this point because as a minor tradition of radical or popular democracy, community organising is not widely known in the academy, and thus basic questions can arise as to its origins, history, and presence in England.⁹⁶ This chapter will close with the story of community organising in England up to the present and will reflect briefly on its reception here from an Anglican point of view.

The origins of community organising

Community organising was born on the evening of July 14th 1939 at a People's Congress in the auditorium of the Field House at Davis Square Park in south-west Chicago.⁹⁷ On that evening, the Back of the Yards Neighbourhood Council (BNYC), a residential area adjacent to the stockyards of the city's meat industry, agreed a constitution and approved a plan to regenerate the neighbourhood. Chicago's standing as a racially and ethnically plural city was evident that night as 350 delegates representing 76 community groups launched the new council. Diverse ethnic and religious groups stood side by side – Poles and Slovaks next to Germans, Irish and Mexicans, and Catholics, Protestants, and Jews assembling together.

Chicago in the 1930s was America's third largest city having increased in population from 30,000 in 1850 to over three million by 1940. Chicago was also experiencing the first wave of an internal migration of African-Americans from southern states in search of a better life in the north. The Back of the Yard area had been incorporated into the city in 1889, having been previously the town of Lake, in Cook County, Illinois.⁹⁸ The arrival of railway junctions and the union stockyards in the mid-19th-century expanded the population in the area, which the rapid immigration of the turn of the century had already turned into a patchwork of enclaves including Poles, Bohemians, Slovaks, Mexicans, Germans and Irish. Like London's East End, the area was a magnet for academic research and housed the University of Chicago's

⁹⁶ Recent presentations of Alinsky's politics as practiced by the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF) include: Osterman, P, *Gathering Power: The Future of Progressive Politics in America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002); Stout, J, *Blessed are the Organized: Grass Roots Democracy in America* (Princeton: Princeton Press, 2010).

⁹⁷ Finks, P. D, *The Radical Vision of Saul Alinsky* (New York: Paulist Press, 1984), p.17.

⁹⁸ www.bync.org, the Back of the Yards Neighbourhood Council is still in existence today as a community development organisation.

Settlement House. Von Hoffman, an organiser who later worked with Alinsky describes the area in which Alinsky established his neighbourhood council.

In back of the meat packing plants the workers lived in perfect disharmony; heavily Polish in composition but with seven or eight other ethnic groups in permanent struggle with themselves and with each other ... A permanent stink hung in the air, ranging from day to day in quality from disgusting to revolting. Most of the thousands of packing house workers lived on silver-thin lots in creaky, wooden houses that looked as if they might tip over, being twice as high as they were wide ... Many spoke English with difficulty if at all, and none of them spoke to each other. Each nationality had its own parish, parochial school and convent. Services were conducted in each group's language and nobody, clergy included, had anything to do with the other.⁹⁹

The Catholic parishes were the most important social groups enlisted in support of the new council.¹⁰⁰ A multitude of men's and women's recreational clubs and leagues, sporting associations and small businesses were also a feature of the area and represented at the inaugural assembly that night.¹⁰¹ The economic depression in the United States had hit the Back of the Yards neighbourhood hard, and social and pastoral needs were not being adequately met by welfare agencies, the church, or the neighbourhood's associations. Tensions and violence between the ethnic groups had increased in the area.

In the period immediately before the council's launch, the need for a response to neighbourhood conditions had been answered for some by a surge of union activity in the stockyards, where many in the community were employed. On the night the new council was launched, clergy and union leaders sat side by side on the platform with representatives from the local areas clubs, businesses and sporting associations. After a blessing from a local parish priest, Bishop Bernard J. Sheil from the Diocese of Chicago was elected honorary chairman and addressed the meeting. The delegates were then invited to join one of four groups to discuss specific issues concerned with health, child welfare, housing, and unemployment.¹⁰² 'Each committee then presented a report which was discussed, and resolutions were proposed which were then voted on.'¹⁰³ Joseph Meegan, a Catholic layman and director of Davis Square Park, chaired the meeting in which 'people spoke openly and freely'¹⁰⁴ until the meeting's conclusion in the early hours of the following morning. Bishop Sheil described the first meeting 'as one of the most vivid demonstrations of the democratic process in action that I have ever witnessed'.¹⁰⁵ Local community groups, catholic parishes, and the unions were cooperating publicly and politically in a new forum. It was a shock apparently for many in the assembly to learn that a Polish leader with the Packing House Workers Organising Committee, engaged at

⁹⁹ Von Hoffman, N, *Radical: A Portrait of Saul Alinsky* (New York: Nation Books, 2010), pp.28-29.

¹⁰⁰ Horwitt, S. D, *Let Them Call Me Rebel: The Life and Legacy of Saul Alinsky* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1989), p.69.

¹⁰¹ www.bync.org

¹⁰² Slayton, R. A, *Back of the Yards: The Making of a Local Democracy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), p.203.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p.203

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p.203.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p.203.

that moment in a bitter dispute with Armour & Company, one of the most intransigent company's in the yards, was a member of the St John of God's Holy Name Society. Saul Alinsky, considered the founder of community organising, later wrote of the first meeting:

This experience was to the local leadership one of the most vivid demonstrations of the emotional starvation of our people for a place in America, for participation, that they had ever experienced. Some of these leaders found themselves deeply moved by the intentness and the eagerness and the hope in the voices and faces of these delegates as they publicly identified themselves and publicly announced their decision.¹⁰⁶

Alinsky, reflecting on this inaugural meeting, suggested that it expressed a 'starvation for a place in America'. But what more practically had he and Meegan been doing in setting up a neighbourhood council? They had brought together representatives of diverse social groups in a public assembly, which engaged in conversation to address conditions faced in common by the community. This activity had seemingly created a political community. The intentionality in Alinsky and Meegan's creating of a local political community in the Back of the Yards was to be essential to the politics he went on to pioneer in other places. The politics he and Meegan were practising was politics as praxis and a *paideia*, politics in the classical Greek sense, which for Aristotle was a way of life in which virtue was trained. The sense of the action of politics as a praxis that was itself educative, a *paideia*, was a view that Alinsky defended throughout his life¹⁰⁷ and which continues through the emphasis in contemporary community organising that participants should reflect upon each event in order to learn and develop from the praxis of the political action itself.

Alinsky's path to the back of the yards

Saul Alinsky (1909-72) was a 30-year-old graduate student working in the University of Chicago's Institute of Juvenile Research, part of the university's Chicago Area Project, when he initiated the Back of the Yards Neighbourhood Council.¹⁰⁸ The son of Russian-Jewish immigrant parents, Alinsky had entered the University of Chicago in 1926 with the intention of studying archaeology. After two poor academic years he became interested in the work of Robert Park and Ernest Burgess, leading figures in the university's sociology department. The department was studying the micro-ecology of urban neighbourhoods and was interested in the interaction of biography and environment in accounting for differing rates of crime. The department saw differing levels of social organisation and disorganisation in the social ecology of urban neighbourhoods, particularly in so-called 'transitional areas',

¹⁰⁶ Alinsky, S, *Reveille for Radicals* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), p.49.

¹⁰⁷ See the conversation between Myles Horton and Paulo Freire on Alinsky's view of the practice of politics as itself educative in: Horton, M, and Freire, P, *We Make the Road by Walking: Conversations on Education and Social Change*, eds. B. Bell et al, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990), pp.115-128.

¹⁰⁸ The most detailed if not inspiring biography of Alinsky remains: Horwitt, S. D, *Let Them Call Me Rebel: The Life and Legacy of Saul Alinsky* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1989).

where immigrant communities lived and worked, as the primary cause of high levels of crime and delinquency. This theoretical approach to crime was different from the psychological view that high crime rates were a consequence of the concentration of individuals with delinquent personality in an area, an interpretive trend in criminology that had been more normative earlier in the century.¹⁰⁹

Alinsky had shown ability on Burgess's course on organised crime, enjoying his assignments as a participant-observer to various habitats with which crime was associated in the city and writing up his experiences in case studies. After his graduation, the university offered Alinsky graduate work towards a career in criminology, working with Clifford Shaw researching juvenile delinquency in the city. This involved Alinsky studying the Sholto, an Italian street gang on the west side of the city and members of the Capone gang. Recording the life histories of gang members in relation to their neighbourhoods was an essential part of this research. Alinsky became skilled at this, gaining the trust and respect of the gang members and gathering life stories which he planned to use in a book with Shaw.¹¹⁰

After a three-year assignment assessing the suitability of prisoners for parole at Joliet Prison, Alinsky returned to Chicago and Shaw placed him in the newly established Institute of Juvenile Research (IJR), of which he had become director. This was a new department of the Chicago Areas Project, which, as well as providing child guidance, psychiatric services and research programmes, was developing a more practical arm, establishing youth committees and recreational and educational programmes in neighbourhood centres.¹¹¹

Alinsky's experience of fieldwork and detached social work was to be influential in the later development of community organising as a practice. His experience of recording life histories would influence the future practice of one to ones, or relational meetings, in which community organisers build community organisations by visiting people, asking questions about motivation and listening to people's stories. Organiser's develop relational skills that are alert to people's interests and attachments as what might provide the basis for cooperation in an area. The organisers who later worked for Alinsky would be asked to keep detailed records of the people they met, their stories and a full description of their neighbourhoods. The field research methods used by the Chicago sociology department are an example of approaches returning in popularity today in ethnographic and action research.

Of importance in Alinsky's diversion away from a career in criminology was the entry by the IJR under Shaw's leadership into the field of social work, or community development. The IJR's new venture was to set up youth committees and

¹⁰⁹ Vold, G. B, et al, *Theoretical Criminology*, 4th ed., (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp.140-157.

¹¹⁰ Horwitt, S. D, *Let Them Call Me Rebel: The Life and Legacy of Saul Alinsky* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1989), p.25.

¹¹¹ Vold, G. B, et al, *Theoretical Criminology*, 4th ed., (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp.140-157.

programmes with native leadership beyond the reach of existing institutions. This process correlates with Alinsky's subsequent development of people's organisations. In developing its work in this way, the IJR incurred some hostility from social work agencies providing similar services with professional staff in the settlement houses of the area. The IJR's entrance into detached, ground-up, local community development with indigenous leadership, work that Alinsky was employed to do by the IJR, can be seen as an important step towards Alinsky's role in creating the Back of the Yards Neighbourhood Council.

Alinsky went beyond his job description in his work with the IJR. Although Shaw saw that research had to be combined with strategies that addressed the consequences of social disorganisation, and although this strategy took on more of a practical edge by establishing committees of local leaders, it could not go beyond providing diversionary activities for youth without a more explicit political agenda being apparent. This was a development that Shaw was not prepared to countenance; such a step would have compromised the IJR's primary status as a research unit, with some ancillary services, under the institutional authority of the university. Alinsky was to act beyond the bounds of his professional role with the university in establishing the Back of the Yards Council.

The sociology department's theoretical orientation regarded the city as a kind of laboratory for observing social processes in which social organisation and disorganisation could be researched. The department interpreted the transitional areas of the city in which immigrant communities lived, and within which Alinsky worked, as disclosing patterns of invasion, dominance, and succession, and their social consequences in Durkheimian anomie and normlessness. These were regarded as autonomous and inevitable social processes. Yet Alinsky appears to have come to regard the city as a morally charged arena of conflicting social forces, in which improvements in the living conditions of the people and communities he had been studying could only be achieved through some political self-organisation which the neighbourhoods he was familiar with lacked. As he later wrote, 'Many of the problems that seem to have their roots in the neighbourhood in reality stem from sources far removed ... To a considerable extent these problems are the result of vast destructive forces that pervade the entire social scene.'¹¹² Experience in studying the relationship between biography and social environment, families, friends, and social ties, as factors in the causation of delinquency, had convinced him that the people affected were as much victims of their circumstances as they were symptoms of it, and that the urban neighbourhoods he studied suffered from a lack of political self-defence.

Union activity

Alinsky's deployment to set up youth committees in the Back of the Yards coincided with a burst of union activity in the stockyards that captured his interest. This was a

¹¹² Alinsky, S, *Reveille for Radicals* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), p.60.

national development taking place under the umbrella of the newly formed Congress of Industrial Organisations (CIO) under the leadership of John L. Lewis.¹¹³ Lewis's personality and political flair was an influence on Alinsky, who got to know him personally and whose first book was a biography of Lewis. The CIO was broadening the appeal of union membership beyond traditional trades and crafts, unionising workers in industrial plants. Alinsky lost interest in his work for the IJR and became more interested in how a local CIO affiliate, the Packinghouse Workers Organising Committee, went about their work in the stockyards. He spent some months befriending union officials and observing their methods and tactics. Alinsky 'learned how to organise mass meetings, focus attention on what really bothered people, direct an action, raise money, and recruit members'.¹¹⁴ He also became alert to the limitations of union activity, of 'its failure to create strong bonds in urban neighbourhoods' beyond the work place.¹¹⁵

Alinsky's research had focused on the lives of individuals and groups in the places where they lived and these interests did not appear within the union's important but more restricted focus on wages and working conditions. The absence of politics in the local community where people spent their time outside of work caught Alinsky's imagination. In creating the Back of the Yards Council, Alinsky brought what he had learnt in his criminology fieldwork together with his knowledge of union methods in the stockyards into an experiment in creating a political community rooted in the life and customs of local people.

In the course of his work for the IJR, Alinsky had met a high-school teacher Joseph Meegan, who ran the Davis Park Square Recreation Centre for the city. Meegan was a charming and popular man in the neighbourhood, a member of a local Catholic parish with family connections in the Archdiocese. Alinsky and Meegan began to meet regularly to discuss how some political cooperation across ethnic divisions in the Back of the Yards might be achieved. These conversations between Alinsky and Meegan in 1938 were the start of what was to become 'community organising'.

The major obstacle to better cooperation between the disparate groups in the area was the tension between the Catholic parishes and the Packinghouse Workers Union. The parish clergy were mostly hostile to the unionising efforts in the yards, regarding the movement as communist and advising people to avoid it. This strengthened the hand of the companies in the yards who were adept at resisting union demands and playing the ethnic groups off against each other. Divide and rule was also to be seen in the pattern of ethnically divided political wards played against each other by the Democratic Party in the City. Alinsky and Meegan decided on a strategy to create a form of local democracy: Alinsky would approach the unions

¹¹³ Alinsky's first book was a portrait of Lewis: Alinsky, S, *John L. Lewis, An Unauthorised Biography* (New York: G.P. Putnam's, 1949).

¹¹⁴ Finks, P, *The Radical Vision of Saul Alinsky*, (New York: Paulist Press, 1984), p.15.

¹¹⁵ Sennett, R, *Better Together: The Rituals, Pleasures & Politics of Cooperation* (London: Penguin Books, 2012), p.51.

and Meegan would visit the parish clergy, neighbourhood associations, and businesses. They did so intensively in the months leading up to the inauguration of the Back of the Yards Council.

The church in Chicago

The Roman Catholic Church in America was a predominantly urban and immigrant church for whom the movement from Europe to America meant the bracing experience of urban and industrial life in a democratic republic, a society without a tradition of Catholic culture. The Cardinal Archbishop of Chicago, George Mundelein, was an energetic and centralising manager, keen to make the church at home on American soil and the initiator of a large building programme of parishes and schools and a new seminary, St Mary of the Lake at Libertyville, on the outskirts of the city. Mundelein was anxious to stop the proliferation of ethnic parishes springing up as the city's immigrant population swelled. He encouraged Catholics to attend churches by territory rather than by ethnicity.¹¹⁶ This was strongly resisted by many ethnic parishes including the neighbourhood where Alinsky and Meegan were working. The resistance ethnic parishes put up to Mundelein's policy suggests he underestimated the degree to which the church in immigrant neighbourhoods was integral to the sustaining the micro-level of family networks, social ties and traditions among new arrivals in precarious conditions. The Catholic Church with which Alinsky engaged in Chicago was an immigrant and urban church, characteristics which have remained crucial in the spread and development of Alinsky's politics.

Alinsky and Meegan's strategy was to see the ethnic parishes that Mundelein wanted to inhibit as the basis for political cooperation in the Back of the Yards, beginning with respect for the area's pluralism. The ethnic groups might be celebrated in a political forum that honoured the diversity of the area, met in a neutral space within it, and developed plans for common action to address conditions that all the groups were affected by. A political community could be formed on the basis of respect for and celebration of difference.¹¹⁷ From this point onwards, Alinsky saw that in his form of community politics 'local traditions are the terrain'.¹¹⁸

Chicago clergy

There was a reforming spirit abroad in the formation of Chicago clergy at this time. Seminarians were increasingly coming from the immigrant communities themselves and were trained together in the same seminary. Unlike the older clergy, they had grown up in a multi-ethnic city and were more comfortable with its diversity. Of

¹¹⁶ Slayton, R, *Back of the Yards: The Making of a Local Democracy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), p.135.

¹¹⁷ Alinsky had observed how participants at union congresses, like medieval guilds, assembled proudly with banners and placards representing their union 'Locals'. When the BYNC first met, all the groups were asked to represent their diversity as communities in this way.

¹¹⁸ Stout, J, *Blessed are the Organized: Grass Roots Democracy in America* (Princeton: Princeton Press, 2010), p.102.

importance in clerical formation in the city at this time was Reynold Hillenbrand.¹¹⁹ Hillenbrand, who had been a priest in Chicago, was an enthusiast for the Liturgical Movement developing in Europe, where he had studied. He had been appointed rector at the new seminary of St Mary of the Lake in 1935. One of Hillenbrand's theological interests was in developing a synthesis between Catholic Liturgy and Catholic Social Action, a relationship he had observed in Joseph Cardijn's Young Christian Workers (YCW) movement while studying in Europe. Hillenbrand believed in the presence of Christ in the worshipping assembly, not just in the priest, and in the active participation of the laity in liturgy and in the life of the local community. Hillenbrand's regime at St Mary of the Lake was an austere yet stimulating environment for a generation of Chicago clergy whose ministries stretched to the end of the 20th century. Hillenbrand invited socially engaged Catholics such as Dorothy Day to address seminarians at St Mary of the Lake. Saul Alinsky too had met with students at St Mary by 1943.¹²⁰

Bishop B.J. Sheil

Alinsky and Meegan were helped to achieve political cooperation in the Back of the Yards by the support and encouragement of Bishop Bernard J. Sheil, who had become an auxiliary bishop in the archdiocese in 1939. Sheil was unusual within the Catholic hierarchy at that time, outspoken in his support of worker's rights and approving of closer links between the church and the unions. He was also a champion for racial justice.¹²¹ He advised Meegan on his approach to the area's clergy and encouraged parishes to join the new council.¹²² Sheil was a popular speaker and it was knowledge of his intention to attend the BYNC's inaugural meeting, and speak on the same platform as union leaders, which persuaded many local Catholic clergy to take the decision to attend the council's first congress.¹²³

The Back of the Yards Neighbourhood Council became a success. At its first meeting it committed itself to developing a local recreation centre; to implement child nutrition and disease prevention programmes; as well as publicly urging the Armour Company in the stockyards to avert an impending strike by negotiating with the Packinghouse Workers Union. This first meeting saw pastoral needs addressed, and reconciliation between conflicting parties in the stockyards promoted, through a local and public process of democratic political participation. Meegan continued for

¹¹⁹ Tuzik, R, and Hillenbrand, R, *The Reform of the Catholic Liturgy and the Call to Social Action* (Chicago: Hillenbrand Books, 2010).

¹²⁰ Frisbee, M, *An Alley in Chicago, The Life and Legacy of Monsignor John Egan* (Franklin, Wisconsin: Sheed & Ward, 2002), p.29.

¹²¹ Sheil was asked by a union leader Herbert March to write a pamphlet 'attacking racism', which became 'the standard CIO piece on the subject in many parts of the country'; Slayton, R. A, *Back of the Yards: The Making of a Local Democracy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), p.200.

¹²² Slayton, R. A, *Back of the Yards: The Making of a Local Democracy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), pp.200-201.

¹²³ Sanford D. Horwitt, *Let Them Call Me Rebel: Saul Alinsky-His Life and Legacy* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1989), p.74.

some years to play his part as a local leader in the council, but Alinsky was inspired to pioneer this politics further afield. The early years of the BYNC established Alinsky's method and reputation. Alinsky's pragmatic politics and passion for social justice had struck a chord among sections of the Catholic community. Creating a political community from indigenous leaders in local parishes and neighbourhood associations to improve social conditions in a balkanised neighbourhood was a striking initiative. Von Hoffman underlines just how impressive this work was:

To appreciate who Alinsky was and what he accomplished one must know how violent and unforgiving were the divisions between groups and subgroups ... The viciousness and absoluteness of racial, religious and ethnic separation in the big cities of the first half of the 20th century are unimaginable to some 21st-century Americans brought up on the ideals of diversity and sensitivity to others.¹²⁴

Alinsky went on to create several more community organisations as director of the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF), which he had established in 1940 to continue his work. He wrote two books on popular democracy¹²⁵ and established a training institute for community organisers before his death in 1972.

Alinsky and the church

Following the foundation of the Back of the Yards Neighbourhood Council, Alinsky's work with clergy and congregations has been a consistent feature that has continued in the work of the IAF wherever community organisations have been established. Catholic, Protestant and independent churches have all played a part in community organising's history since its earliest decades, and racial justice and an ecumenical trajectory have been key features of its organisational culture.¹²⁶ For example, the Temporary Wood Lawn Organisation (TWO), created in Chicago in the 1960s, was initiated by Presbyterian clergy and funding, had a predominantly black membership that included Muslims, and a Pentecostal pastor, the Rev. Arthur Brazier, as one of its key leaders.¹²⁷

Alinsky and Maritain

Alinsky had close friendships with many Catholics during his life. Notable among these was a friendship with the philosopher Jacques Maritain. Maritain met Alinsky

¹²⁴ Von Hoffman, N, *Radical: A Portrait of Saul Alinsky* (New York: Nation Books, 2010), p.16.

¹²⁵ Alinsky, S, *Reveille for Radicals* (New York: Vintage Books, 1945); Alinsky, S, *Rules for Radicals* (New York: Vintage Books, 1971).

¹²⁶ Von Hoffman, N, *Radical: A Portrait of Saul Alinsky* (Philadelphia: Nation Books, 2010), pp.48-54. Racial injustice was an important issue for Alinsky from the beginning of his career. One of the early achievements of BYNC was the securing of safe passage for African-Americans walking through the Back of the Yards to work. BYNC and the Packinghouse Workers Union also made it possible for African-Americans to eat at some lunch counters in the neighbourhood in the early 1950s. See Halpern, R, and Horowitz, R, *Meatpackers, An Oral History of Black Packinghouse Workers and their Struggle for Racial and Economic Equality* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1999), p.57.

¹²⁷ Horowitz, S, *Let Them Call Me Rebel: The Life and Legacy of Saul Alinsky* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1989), pp.390-449.

in the early 1940s and became familiar with his people's organisations.¹²⁸ Maritain's friendship with Alinsky led to a visit by Alinsky in the mid-1950s to Archbishop Montini of Milan, the future Pope Paul VI, to advise him on church strategy with Catholic workers attracted by communist organisations in the city.¹²⁹ Alinsky was an agnostic Jew who could never say precisely what drove him to do what he did in creating political organisations in poor neighbourhoods beyond not being able to 'stand seeing people being pushed around'.¹³⁰ Maritain perhaps saw more deeply into Alinsky than he saw into himself, as Bretherton suggests: 'refusing his contrarian self-descriptions ... and discerning an inner theologic in his work'.¹³¹ Maritain wrote of Alinsky to a third party: 'I know (this is the privilege of an old man) that the deep rooted motive power and inspiration of this so-called trouble maker is pure and entire self-giving, and love for those poor images of God which are human beings, especially the oppressed ones-in other words, it is what St Paul calls *agape*, or love of charity.'¹³²

Alinsky's closeness to the Catholic community resulted in part from his criminology fieldwork, through which he had seen how Catholic parishes were woven into the everyday life of communities in immigrant areas. Alinsky's research whilst he was working for the university, was to obtain a better understanding of the processes of the breakdown of social controls, but his step into building political communities with the church as an ally, suggests that the sociological theory he had learnt at the university did not sufficiently account for the solidarities that already existed at the micro-level of urban communities and which needed support in the face of harsh urban conditions. Family life and social relations were being sustained in immigrant areas and Catholic and other religious communities were supporting people at a local level often more directly than other agencies and institutions. In these circumstances, the churches could be seen as a protecting and sustaining local forms of community and Alinsky's organisations encouraged a more active political defence of these.

Bretherton suggests that Maritain saw in Alinsky's work a demonstration of his own conception of a Christian Democracy: 'Alinsky's neighbourhood councils were in a way the embodiment of Maritain's vision of a personalist and pluralist pattern of social, economic and political life that was a precondition of true democracy.'¹³³ There is more explicit evidence of this in Maritain's *Reflections on America*, a book

¹²⁸ For the depth of this friendship see Doering, B, *The Philosopher and The Provocateur: The Correspondence of Jacques Maritain and Saul Alinsky* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994).

¹²⁹ According to David Finks, during his stay in Milan Alinsky went out in the evenings to meet with a local communist leader to discuss politics in the city. See Finks, P. D, *The Radical Vision of Saul Alinsky*, (New York: Paulist Press, 1984), p.114.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, p.249.

¹³¹ Bretherton, L, *Christianity and Contemporary Politics: The Conditions and Possibilities of Faithful Witness* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), p.93.

¹³² Doering, B, *The Philosopher and The Provocateur: The Correspondence of Jacques Maritain and Saul Alinsky* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), p.109.

¹³³ Bretherton, L, *Christianity and Contemporary Politics: The Conditions and Possibilities of Faithful Witness* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), p.91.

based on seminars Maritain hosted at the University of Chicago in 1956.¹³⁴ The importance Maritain had attached to the intermediate associations between the individual and the state in his work *Integral Humanism*¹³⁵, written before his first visit to America, are said to have become more visible to him from his experience in the United States. He suggests that in writing *Integral Humanism*, there was a kind of ‘affinity by anticipation of the American climate’.¹³⁶ In a section entitled ‘The Community as Grass-Roots Structure’¹³⁷, noting the distinction with Europe, he writes that in America ‘... we are confronted with a social structure which is spontaneously and organically differentiated from its very base’.¹³⁸ He goes on to write of a ‘swarming multiplicity of particular communities, self-organised groupings, associations, unions, sodalities, vocational and religious brotherhoods, with which men join forces with one another at the elementary level of their everyday concerns and interests’.¹³⁹ Such a milieu ‘resembles a medieval feature’ or complex space.¹⁴⁰ He observes that this pluralism is a more evident feature of society in America compared with Europe. Alinsky’s work with the IAF is commended in this work and Alinsky’s people’s organisations are clearly in mind when he writes: ‘It is in America that I have had a real experience of concrete, existential democracy: not as a set of abstract slogans, or as a lofty ideal, but as an actual human, working, perpetually tested and perpetually readjusted way of life.’¹⁴¹

Maritain’s influential social thought has been criticised for the consequences of his distinction between spiritual and temporal realms.¹⁴² Cavanaugh reads this distinction as spiritualising the church as a flesh and blood body and as later contributing to a passivity by church authorities in defending Catholics when they were being tortured by the military regime in Chile. Maritain has also been criticised for the optimism of his hopes for the development of American society and the potential for a new Christendom. He thought that the post-war United States showed evidence of developing a form of society beyond capitalism and socialism.¹⁴³ The decay of the associative life of democracies in an era of widespread political disaffection and the power of corporations, the danger of which Maritain was noting in the 1950s¹⁴⁴, make his confidence in American society strike us today as overly optimistic. Maritain’s social thought was addressed to mid-20th-century ruling elites in nations menaced by totalitarianisms of both the left and the right, and in which

¹³⁴ Maritain, J, *Reflections on America* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1958).

¹³⁵ Maritain, J, *Integral Humanism* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1968).

¹³⁶ Maritain, J, *Reflections on America* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1958), p.175.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.161-165.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, p.162.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, p.162.

¹⁴⁰ See, ‘On Complex Space.’ In, Milbank J, *The Word Made Strange: Theology, Language, Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993).

¹⁴¹ Maritain, J, *Reflections on America* (New York: Charles Scribner’s, 1958), p.161.

¹⁴² Cavanaugh, W. T, *Torture and Eucharist: Theology, Politics, and the Body of Christ* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), pp.151-202.

¹⁴³ Maritain, J, *Reflections on America* (New York: Charles Scribner’s, 1958), p.115.

¹⁴⁴ Maritain, J, *Reflections on America* (New York: Charles Scribner’s, 1958), p.110.

support for democracies by Christian intellectuals found an audience in societies where the church retained some power and influence at the heart of social orders.

The church's position in Western societies is now less central and influential, but we should not forget that Maritain's faith in a 'personalist, pluralist, and communitarian democracy' was not only a matter of his view of democracy at the scale of society and state. It was sustained in part by his familiarity with the local democracy he had seen practised by Catholics and other Christians in Alinsky's neighbourhood organisations. Maritain did much personally to persuade the Catholic Church internationally in the middle decades of the 20th century to accept the partial autonomy of secular states and to endorse the politics of liberal democracies.

Alinsky was not primarily interested in the wider politics of the American state, or indeed of the wider church. The agents of the state were but one set of representatives with whom his organisations had pragmatically to negotiate in a politics grounded at the scale of the institutions and associations of local communities. Such a location will often find his organisations engaging with the representatives of states, local and national, and with other actors in the market and wider society, but as a politics, community organisations are crucially not dependent on the state or political parties for their political initiative or agency. The local units of the church militant in particular parishes and congregations as actively political, as well as devotional constituencies on the ground, was a part of Alinsky's vision from early on. In 1942 Alinsky addressed the National Conference of Catholic Charities and made a distinction between 'ritual' and 'religious' Catholics, a distinction he also thought applied to Protestants and Jews. Ritual Catholics were those for whom:

The 'teachings of the church are simply a set of ceremonials ... Baptism, Mass on Sunday, Communion, Confirmation, fast days or dispensations, an occasional retreat, Extreme Unction'. He thought that these ritualists formed the majority of the church. On the other hand, the 'religious' Christians were those who carried in them, deep in their hearts and minds, 'those precepts, teachings, morals and the faith which in themselves constitute the Catholic Church. These were the church people who lived their faith in everyday life. One rarely hears,' Saul noted, 'the cry of prejudice arising from religious Catholics.' Needless to say, Saul considered the latter types, the people who joined him on the urban barricades, the religious ones; the rest, he said were caught in 'the old ritualistic rut' and were no help to anyone. Obviously Saul did not believe in waiting for the Last Judgement to separate the sheep from the goats.¹⁴⁵

The 'preconditions for a wider democracy' that Bretherton suggests Maritain saw in Alinsky's organisations have become subsequently more important in their local manifestation in contemporary conditions, as the moral idealism for secular liberal democracies has faded under the present impact of globalised markets. Bretherton argues that Alinsky's politics 'allow for a church practice of the political' something Cavanaugh criticises Maritain's social thought for preventing, arguing that 'if

¹⁴⁵ Finks, P. D, *The Radical Vision of Saul Alinsky* (New York: Paulist Press, 1984), p.259.

Maritain points to a deeper reading of Alinsky, Alinsky points to a way beyond Maritain'.¹⁴⁶ Bretherton writes:

Community organising as a form of democratic politics is a mode of action in which those charged with bearing witness to the Gospel do three things simultaneously: first they act defensively to uphold or forge anew an institutional plurality that serves as a bulwark against the totalising thrust of modern forms of economic and political power; second they hold to account governing authorities so as to enable right or fit judgements to be made through a meaningful process of consultation and deliberation; and third they act constructively, by forging public friendships and enabling the discernment of goods in common that form the basis of an earthly peace in which all, including Christians, may find their welfare. In short it is away for churches to relate acts of political judgement and realise obligations of neighbour love in the public sphere.¹⁴⁷

This description of 'a way beyond Maritain' starts with a politics in which the church participates as a social body, rather than from a wider political framework of the church in the space of a secular state, the frame largely informing Maritain's discussions of Christianity and democracy. This shift in focus is perhaps reflective of the changed position of the churches in relation to society and state seven decades on from Maritain's times.

Alinsky's relationship with Maritain has a symbolic significance in a century in which Catholicism's relationship with democracy became a subject of increasing reflection for the Catholic Church. A democratic current in the Catholic culture of the 19th and 20th centuries, in which Maritain came to be highly influential, had by the latter decades of the 20th century led to a climate of acceptance for the partial autonomy of secular states and implicit approval of liberal democracies as forms of government. Without a climate of support for democracy and a gathering body of social teaching within Catholic culture in the 20th century, it is doubtful if Alinsky's organisations would have met with as kindly a reception within Catholic constituencies as they sometimes did.

The development of community organising

After Alinsky's death, the political practices he had pioneered were continued and developed by the organisers he had trained. Edward Chambers (1930-2015), a former seminarian who had worked with Alinsky, succeeded him as director of the IAF. Alinsky's gifts lay in his political talent, insight, and contrarian charisma. This was exciting but precarious work for his organisers, who had little financial security or support. Under Chambers the work of community organisers was made more secure, and in the late 1970s and early 1980s Chambers and other senior organisers developed the educational culture of the IAF, distilling what had been learnt from Alinsky, and reviewed the successes and failures of radical democratic initiatives in community organising and the civil rights and free speech movements of the 1960s.

¹⁴⁶ Bretherton, L, *Christianity and Contemporary Politics: The Conditions and Possibilities of Faithful Witness* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), p.96.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p.94.

Their reflections on organisational development made in the early 1980s bear repeating for their practical wisdom:

- Movements that depended on charismatic leaders fell apart in the absence of the leader.
- Organisations formed around a single issue died when the issue lost its potency.
- Organisations that relied on public money, private grants, or the largesse of a few wealthy contributors could never become truly independent.
- Organisations which became overly procedural lost the momentum and flexibility to act.
- Organisations whose leaders acted autonomously without a system of internal accountability became corrupt when no one monitored their actions.
- Organisations that played to the public spotlight confused their desire for media attention with their strategy for change.
- Organisations that scrambled continuously to respond to a crisis got caught up in a whirlwind of activity that soon exhausted their leaders.¹⁴⁸

Chambers and his staff developed a teaching curriculum and training courses for community organising. Scriptural and theological reflection on community organising deepened in the 1980s, especially in the south-west organising networks.¹⁴⁹ The recrafting of the internal culture of the IAF by Chambers and his colleagues in the 1980s has significantly changed the ethos in which community organising is practised by the IAF and its affiliates today. Whilst remaining faithful to the importance of a practical, robust, and assertive politics, Alinsky's abrasive and confrontational style has evolved into a more mature and reflective ethos within the contemporary IAF. Alinsky was a man of his generation and, although respectful towards women, he did not recruit them as organisers, or particularly encourage women in the work of his networks. This too changed under Chambers' directorship and women are fully represented and encouraged as organisers and leaders in the contemporary work of the IAF. In England and elsewhere, these developments have allowed the work of community organising to be more readily accommodated within the broader institutional cultures of the church and other religious and secular organisations.

With little publicity Alinskyian community organisations have spread into many communities in the United States over the past 75 years, and his methods have been used in other parts of the world, for example in the People Power movement in the Philippines, which resisted the Marcos regime. In the United States, the IAF has received substantial funding from the Catholic Campaign for Human Development. Other Community Organising networks have also developed outside the IAF, such as the Pacific Institute of Community Organizing (PICO), Direct Action Research and Training (DART), and the Gamaliel Foundation, the latter of which offered a job to a young Barack Obama in Chicago in the early 1980s.

¹⁴⁸ Rogers, M. B, *Cold Anger: A Story of Faith and Power Politics* (Denton, Texas: University of North Texas Press, 1990), pp.95-96. Such reflections provide a sad commentary on the collapse of the children's charity Kids Company in August 2015.

¹⁴⁹ Warren, M. R, *Dry Bones Rattling: Community Building to Revitalize American Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), pp.58-61.

Community organising and liberation theology

As a communal politics in pursuit of social justice Alinsky's politics have an affinity with liberationist currents that emerged and flourished within parts of the Catholic world in the latter part of the 20th century. Curran thought that Alinsky's politics and liberation theology shared a basic understanding of sociology and epistemology. Firstly, 'Liberation theology rightly reacts against a value-free sociology ... and insists that all knowledge is situated and subject to prejudice ... Alinsky opposes the myth of knowledge as objective and value free ... there is no dispassionate objectivity.'¹⁵⁰ Secondly, liberation theology follows the option for the poor and Alinsky 'sides with the powerless-the have-nots-in their struggle'. Thirdly, although Alinsky does not use the term 'conscientisation', Curran sees it as the cornerstone of his method: 'Through an un-alienating and liberating cultural action, the oppressed person perceives and modifies their relationship to the world. The person thus moves from naïve awareness to a critical awareness.'¹⁵¹ An example of conscientisation at work in organising can be heard in the following testimony from Tomasita:

In the past they taught us that politics should not be related to religion or to the church, and I always thought of it in that way. But now since I have realised that it is for the well-being of everybody, I think that we were wrong ... Before, it used to be very different. For me the church was made up of those who visit the sick, those who care about the families that are suffering, who care for those in jail, for all these things. For me this is what religion is about. But as I gave myself the opportunity to learn more about Valley Interfaith, to learn what it is about, I realised that I was limiting my religion too much. Because my religion can't be based only on the sick and the dead, but also it has to be based on the existing world, on those who live, those who are suffering, those who are unemployed, those who are being mistreated, those who are being humiliated, those who are sick. To give them hope of love and peace, of comfort, on God's behalf, which is very important, but it is also important to give them hope where there is some type of benefit for them, of the fight.¹⁵²

Fourthly, according to Curran, liberation theology accepts conflict in its 'social analyses and praxis'¹⁵³ and realises that change has to be bought about through the use of power, an analysis also central to Alinsky's politics. Alinsky's politics differ from liberation theology in Curran's view, in that organising does not use a Marxist social analysis and Alinsky 'defines his radicalism in terms of a commitment to a true democracy'.¹⁵⁴ Alinsky was not interested in overthrowing states or in promoting revolution or illegal political activity. He had a deep reformist faith in people's capacity to change systems from within, a deep faith in people's political capacity to effect change in situations of oppressive power through their responsible

¹⁵⁰ Curran, C. E, *Directions in Catholic Social Ethics* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1985), p.157.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p.158.

¹⁵² Osterman, P, *Gathering Power: The Future of Progressive Politics in America*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002), p.102.

¹⁵³ Curran, C. E, *Directions in Catholic Social Ethics* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1985), p.159.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p.160.

action together. This was of course most possible in societies in which democratic freedoms were established in law, but for Alinsky it was the practice of these freedoms that the law permitted in free and open societies, which was decisive in the pursuit of ‘a true democracy’.

Curran is right to suggest that Alinsky’s politics and liberation theology share an ‘option for the poor’, and that community organising has not shared the Marxist social analysis. This difference has become more important in recent decades because class-based analyses have sometimes inhibited the political work of building collaborative alliances across class divisions that might further the interests of the poor. Alinsky’s organisations have been increasingly mixed alliances in terms of class, and pragmatic in terms of who they work with. As community organiser Ernesto Cortes put it, ‘We work with the rich, and we work with the poor, and if push comes to shove, we side with the poor.’¹⁵⁵ Although he does not make the connection explicitly, Bretherton draws attention to another connection between the democratic political tradition and the biblical tradition of liberation theology in their common opposition to economic slavery and indebtedness. He writes that what emerges from the scholarly literature on debt slavery in ancient Greece ‘is that debt and the emergence of democracy were inextricably linked’¹⁵⁶ and that ‘at the heart of the salvation narratives of both Old and New Testaments the power of money and liberation from debt slavery are central concerns’.¹⁵⁷

Given the associations often and usually simplistically made between liberation theology and Marxism, it should be noted that liberation theologians have not been opposed to the kind of participatory democracy that Alinsky promoted. Opposition to democracy from the proponents of liberation theology was to the procedural democracies established by governing elites in Latin America, in which participation was minimal, the market deregulated and the interests of the poor ignored.¹⁵⁸ Political hopes for the church in Latin America usually rested on the fortunes of political parties for whom the members of base communities might vote. In the neo-liberal democracies that came to Latin America in the 1980s and 1990s, the lack of a church-based democratic practice left liberation theology with little political expression when existent socialisms fell in Europe and socialist and Marxist parties frequently failed in open democratic elections.

Rowland lists the features that characterise liberation theology as manifested in the life of the basic ecclesial communities (BEC’s) which proliferated widely in Brazil and other parts of Latin America in the 1970s and 1980s:

¹⁵⁵ Cortes, E, senior organiser with the IAF; from a personal conversation with the author.

¹⁵⁶ Bretherton, L, *Resurrecting Democracy: Faith, Citizenship, and the Politics of a Common Life* (Cambridge: CUP, 2015), p.244.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p.246.

¹⁵⁸ See, for example, Maclean, I. A, *Opting for Democracy: Liberation Theology and the Struggle for Democracy in Brazil* (New York: Peter Lang, 1999).

- rootedness in an everyday experience of poverty
- use of scripture related to experience
- location in the pastoral life of the church
- thriving in worship and meetings
- ‘joining in common projects for human welfare in health and education’
- ‘engaging the whole person in the midst of life’.¹⁵⁹

What is absent in this description is any mention of politics as a practical mediation of the social life of the BECs. I would suggest that the ‘joining in common projects for human welfare’ is a rather vague reference to a dimension of practical politics missing from the habitual life of the BECs and more generally from the horizons of liberation theology. In Brazil, and elsewhere in Latin America, liberation theology has lacked the participatory tradition of democracy that Alinsky’s organisations had been practising with Catholic and other communities on the ground in the United States from the 1940s. The base communities that flourished in Latin America in the 1980s and 1990s were not practicing politically in the way that community organising was facilitating political practice among clergy and laity in the United States in the same period. Petrella sees the demise of liberation theology in recent decades as arising from a ‘missing historical project’¹⁶⁰ which was provided for it at one time by socialism as a political ideal. Petrella sees a deeper alliance between radical democracy and liberation theology as an emerging direction and historical project for liberation theology in the third millennium. A deeper democratisation of the church as a constituency of religious and political subjects, and resistance to the power of the market, will no doubt remain important factors in hopes for such a future.

The relationship between community organising and liberation theology is perhaps best seen in their cross-fertilisation in the context of the rising influence of Latino culture within the church in the United States. From the 1960s onwards, Latino Catholics and Protestants were an increasingly powerful constituency in America.¹⁶¹ In the mid-1970s in San Antonio, Texas, the Mexican American Cultural Centre (MACC) became a place in which liberation theology and community organising interacted. Virgilio Elizondo, a Mexican-American priest and theologian and co-founder of MACC¹⁶², was an interpreter of liberation theology for the Mexican-American community and sympathetic to the work of Alinsky’s community organisations. Both Gustavo Gutierrez and Leonardo Boff taught courses at MACC in the 1980s.¹⁶³ Ernesto Cortes, who was to become one of the IAF’s leading

¹⁵⁹ Rowland, C, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Liberation Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp.1-2.

¹⁶⁰ Petrella, I, *The Future of Liberation Theology: An Argument and Manifesto* (London: SCM Press, 2006), p.11.

¹⁶¹ Diaz-Stevens, A. M. and Stevens-Arroyo, A. M, *Recognizing the Latino Resurgence in U.S. Religion* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1998).

¹⁶² The other co-founder was Bishop Patrick Flores, the first Mexican-American Catholic Bishop.

¹⁶³ Block, S, *Liberation Theology and U.S. Catholics*, 2b., *The Orate Fratres*; fratres.wordpress.com

organisers, was a member of the MACC community. He went on to build the IAF affiliate Communities Organised for Public Service (COPS) in San Antonio and then Valley Interfaith and other community organisations in southwest America where Latino constituencies had been prominent.¹⁶⁴ Osterman narrates the story in which there is an interweaving of liberation theology, base communities, the charismatic movement, and community organising in the IAF's south-western networks in the 1980s and 1990s.¹⁶⁵ The base Christian communities, widespread in Latin America, were to be found on American soil in the *Colonia*'s, 1,400 shanty towns that had developed along the Texas-Mexico border. Clergy and laity who had experienced base communities elsewhere set them up on arrival in the area. There was often tension between the base communities and the Catholic church in Latin America, but in Texas the base communities were encouraged to 'be a part of the ongoing practice of the parishes'.¹⁶⁶ Community organising in southwest America was sometimes actively supported by the Catholic leadership, for example by Bishop Patrick Flores, who publicly support the COPS community organisation in San Antonio and had salaried community organisers on his diocesan staff.¹⁶⁷ In the American Southwest in the 1980s and 1990s, Alinskyian participatory democracy proved to be a fertile ground in which liberationist streams within Catholic culture were to find continuing political expression.

Community organising in England

Alinskyian community organising came to England in the late 1980s. Alinsky's books and reputation were known of in the worlds of community development and social work in Britain in the 1960s and 1970s, but his politics were not considered to be replicable here. Anglican Bishop of Woolwich, John Robinson, in the Anglican Diocese of Southwark had supported experiments with Alinsky's approach to working with churches through the Urban Ministry Project based on the St Helier Estate in south London in the late 1960s and early 1970s, but these initiatives did not lead to the development of community organisations.¹⁶⁸ For the mainstream churches and their social responsibility networks under the political horizons of party politics in the welfare state, community organising's potential for the congregations in urban communities remained largely unknown.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁴ See Rodgers, M. B, *Cold Anger: A Story of Faith and Power Politics* (Denton: University of North Texas Press, 1990) and Putnam, R, *Better Together: Restoring the American Community* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1999).

¹⁶⁵ Osterman, P, *Gathering Power: The Future of Progressive Politics in America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002).

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p.97.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.112-113

¹⁶⁸ See Elliot, M. C, *Freedom, Justice, and Christian Counter Culture* (London: SCM Press, 1990), p. xi.

¹⁶⁹ Alinsky's work with churches was known to a small group of clergy who had knowledge of urban ministry in Chicago. Amongst these were Michael Elliott, Donald Reeves, Tony Dyson, Michael Doe, and Kenneth Leech.

In the late 1980s, in the climate of the combative policies of the Conservative Government, some clergy and community workers were looking for new ways to champion the needs of local communities and the voluntary sector. The *Faith in the City* report published in 1985¹⁷⁰ noted the powerlessness of inner-city communities in the context of changes to the labour market and high levels of unemployment, and had called the church in urban areas to be ‘local, outward-looking, and participative’.¹⁷¹

A group of Anglican clergy and representatives from the voluntary and charitable sector went to the United States in 1989 to attend an IAF training course. Among these were: Tim Stevens, then Team Rector of Canvey Island; Eric Adams from the Barrow-Cadbury Foundation; Peter Firth, Suffragan Bishop of Malmesbury; and Neil Jameson, a Quaker and a regional director for the Children’s Society. They came back impressed by what they had seen and began to lay plans to bring community organising to the UK. The Citizen Organising Foundation (COF) was established in 1989 as a charity and an IAF affiliate. Neil Jameson became the UK’s first professional community organiser, setting up the Communities Organised for a Greater Bristol (COGB), which was launched in 1990. The first funding for community organising in the UK came from the Barrow-Cadbury Trust and the Church Urban Fund, a charitable foundation set up after the *Faith in the City* report.

At this time, members of Catholic Peace and Justice Groups were also meeting regularly with Auxiliary Bishop Victor Guazelli. This group, which included the composer Bernadette Farrell who was to become an outstanding community organiser in south London, had been experimenting with community organising techniques and they persuaded Neil Jameson to move from Bristol to build a community organisation in east London. This became The East London Communities Organisation (TELCO), which was launched in York Hall, Bethnal Green in September 1996. TELCO was the beginning of what has become London Citizens, a pan-London broad-base community organisation, in which south London in 2004, west London in 2007, and north London in 2011 have become integrated into a broad-base network across the capital. London Citizens includes more than 250 congregations, faith organisations, schools, colleges, and union branches in its membership. More than 100 Catholic and Anglican parishes are members, along with independent churches, Islamic organisations and reformed synagogues.

A number of other community organisations were established in the first decade of community organising here – in Liverpool, the West Midlands, Sheffield, Birmingham and North Wales (which continued its work affiliated to Gamaliel, another US organising network that has more recently started organising in Manchester). COF’s organisations outside of London failed to thrive because of funding problems and a lack of experienced and supported organisers, but in its third

¹⁷⁰ *Faith in the City: A Call for Action by Church and Nation*, Archbishop’s Commission on Urban Priority Areas, Church of England, 1985.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, pp.74-80.

decade and with the establishment of Citizens UK as a national umbrella for the work of community organising, there are organisations putting down roots in Nottingham, Cardiff, and Leeds.

Most of this work since the late 1980s has received little wider publicity. More attention has come to community organising in recent years as a result of the continuing and successful living wage campaign. This began with the TELCO organisation in east London persuading HSBC headquarters in Canary Wharf to pay a living wage to their cleaning staff and has since won wide support from political parties, the Roman Catholic Bishops Conference of England and Wales, and the General Synod of the Church of England. The Conservative Government elected in 2015 have adopted the language, if not the financial substance of the Living Wage in announcing a National Living Wage within the first few weeks since their electoral victory.¹⁷² Knowledge of President Barack Obama's spell as a community organiser in the 1980s drew attention to Alinsky's legacy during the United States presidential election of 2009. In 2010, London Citizens persuaded the leaders of all the main political parties to its Accountability Assembly in Methodist Central Hall in the last week of the general election. During the 2015 general election, the BBC aired full coverage of the Citizens UK General Election Assembly at Methodist Central Hall. Apart from the campaign for a living wage, and thousands of smaller actions in local communities, London Citizens has worked for an amnesty and path to citizenship for undocumented migrants in its Strangers into Citizens campaign. It has also developed a Community Land Trust for affordable housing in east London, campaigned successfully for funds for the refurbishment of the reception centre for asylum and immigration enquiries at Lunar House in Croydon, and set up an Independent Asylum Commission, which led to the end of child detention for the children of parents involved in immigration cases before the courts.

The profile of community organising in the UK has also benefited in recent years from increased interest from the theological community. Austen Ivereigh presented community organising to Catholics in Britain as an expression of Catholic Social Teaching. The Methodist Christopher Shannahan has written a theology of community organising and the Anglican Nicholas Sagovsky has written a book on the practice of justice, influenced by his work on the Independent Asylum Commission. Luke Bretherton, also an Anglican, has written two recent books in which analysis of community organising has achieved a new depth and sophistication.¹⁷³

¹⁷² Baltimoreans United in Leadership Development (BUILD), an IAF network, was the first to achieve a living Wage Ordinance in Baltimore in the mid-1990s. Catherine Howarth, an organiser with TELCO in east London, laid plans for a living wage campaign in the late 1990s with Jonathan Lange the lead organiser in BUILD. For an insightful reflection on Baltimore's original living wage campaign see: *'Body politics and the struggle for a living wage'*, in Harvey, D, *Spaces of Hope* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), pp.117-130.

¹⁷³ Ivereigh, A, *Faithful Citizens: A Practical Guide to Catholic Social Teaching and Community Organizing* (London: DLT, 2010); Shannahan, C, *A Theology of Community Organizing: Power to*

An Anglican perspective on the reception of community organising in England

Community organising arrived in England in the late 1980s as a mature method for establishing local political publics in which a radical form of democratic politics could be practised. It was planted here with the help of seasoned organisers who came from the IAF networks in the United States to help it take root.¹⁷⁴ It was a radical politics, not because of the political agendas it created, which were reasonable and responsible, so much as from the places in which this work was done, from the ground up with local congregations and community groups, rather than relying on more centralised structures of social responsibility and action within church bureaucracies. In the same way in which Alinsky's Back of the Yards Neighbourhood Council was established, members of local churches, faith communities, schools and trades union branches were invited into a direct mode of democratic political practice, established through visits, meetings, assemblies, group deliberation, and a continuing process of action and reflection on a rolling agenda of issues generated by the membership of the organisations.

Community organising in Britain is working within a geographically smaller nation than its counterpart in the United States, and this has perhaps made its impact in only two decades of existence here proportionately greater than in the United States. Such a practical approach to social issues has meant that community organising has met with a mixed reception from historic churches as it has developed here. Those accustomed to more institutional cultures of social responsibility within the churches were faced with a direct and participative approach. Senior clergy in the Church of England and other churches could find organising's high-energy assemblies and relational approach to politics disturbing. It was confident and difficult to categorise and Alinsky's reputation as a controversial figure made them wary. Bishops tended to keep an eye on it from a distance rather than risk the exposure of more personal involvement. For bishops to participate in community organising assemblies and political work might be construed as an admission that the public standing of the church's traditional role in society was not in good order and that their roles in public life were less influential.

Perhaps the most common response to community organising in its first two decades of work was a mixture of disorientation and surprise on encountering a tradition of practical politics in which historic churches had been engaged elsewhere, but about which there was almost complete ignorance in England. Apart from ageing copies of Alinsky's books at the back of alternative book shops, there was little literature on

the People (London: RKP, 2013); Sagovsky, N, *Christian Tradition and the Practice of Justice* (London: SPCK, 2008); Bretherton, L, 'Augustine, Alinsky, and the Politics of the Common Good' in *Christianity and Contemporary Politics: The Conditions and Possibilities of Faithful Witness* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell 2010), pp.71-96; Bretherton, L, *Resurrecting Democracy: Faith, Citizenship, and the Politics of a Common Life* (Cambridge: CUP, 2015).

¹⁷⁴ Ernesto Cortes, Edward Chambers, Jonathan Lange, Jim Drake and Christine Stephens.

community organising to be found and library catalogues produced minimal references. Organising has been a lay-led, practical, episodic, and largely ‘oral’ culture of politics practised under the radar of wider cultures of church, politics, and the academy. Bretherton argues that this ambiguous location amidst wider cultural terrains is one of the reasons for its fruitfulness as a form of Christian political practice: ‘For its place-based forms of politics are like common land, providing the possibility of building genuinely public spaces of shared responsibility and cooperation.’¹⁷⁵

The organisers who came to England in the late 1980s and 1990s were the most experienced and gifted the IAF had. They were intelligent, well read, gifted teachers and not always polite.¹⁷⁶ The quality of community organising’s teaching and practice made much of the culture of social responsibility and action within the church appear remote and ineffectual.

There were also sartorial and other cultural differences to adjust to. The radical Christians with a thirst for justice that I knew tended to cultivate a serious but rather casual approach. We wore baggy jumpers and sat around for discussions at meetings that people casually dropped into. The community organisers we encountered dressed smartly in suits and wanted their meetings to start and end on time. Such contrasts may sound trivial, but the organisers presented themselves smartly because they wanted to train us to walk into business premises, offices, and town halls, to engage with people who dressed professionally and had given us an appointment in their busy schedules at which we had to be punctual. Apart from an occasional demonstration or protest event, social action and political work did not have a place in our routine experience of life as church members. Our political imaginations as Christians were inspired by what we had heard and seen of struggles for justice in South Africa, or Eastern Europe or El Salvador. We could not easily identify politics as part of our ordinary experience as members of churches in the places where we lived and worshipped. Those who stuck with organising would come to see that they had been conditioned by visions of radical Christian politics that happened elsewhere, usually abroad, or at the more anarchic edges of political life in society and the state. Those who became interested in community organising were to see

¹⁷⁵ Bretherton, L, *Christianity and Contemporary Politics: The Conditions and Possibilities of Faithful Witness* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell 2010), p.93.

¹⁷⁶ One of Alinsky’s ways of encouraging communities to try new approaches to their problems was to break through the rationalisations that people often held for discrediting new approaches. This is a method that community organisers continue to practise. I once attended a large meeting of clergy and community workers at Whirlow Grange in the Diocese of Sheffield in the early 1990s, at which a litany of the woes afflicting the poor of the diocese was presented by speaker after speaker. On listening to this ceaseless reference to ‘the poor’ and their travails that evoked the distant and faceless objects of the church’s concern, Ernesto Cortes, a Mexican-American organiser who had probably done more working with the Mexican-American poor than anyone in the room realised at the time, and who was a guest on the panel, stood up, looked the audience in the eye, and said, ‘You know what? Fuck “The Poor” ... Organise, organise.’ There was a steely Anglican silence followed by a reenergised discussion of community organising’s approach to the troubles of the poor.

that a radical politics could be practised by church members much closer to home, and that it could be a more familiar dimension of the experience of members of local Christian communities.

Iris speaking up and Welton's cat

Those who engaged in organising found it to be a genuinely empowering, transformative, and enjoyable activity. One of my first experiences of an 'action' took place in a meeting at the Civic Centre with the Labour leader of Wolverhampton Council. The meeting was chaired by Iris, an elderly Caribbean member of our group of local estate residents, religious sisters and clergy. As the meeting got underway, with Iris confidently chairing the discussion, a look of astonishment crossed the council leader's face. He had belatedly recognised Iris as someone he had known as a regular, compliant, and silent member of a local resident's forum. This kind of awakening and transformation is the testimony of many who have participated in community organising. In my own research of the experience of community organising among clergy in London, a Catholic priest gave the following account of a time when a local MP came to a Citizen's meeting about a local zebra crossing. A child delivered a short speech on the issue and the MP laughed:

'He sort of chuckled I suppose, I don't know, the innocence of the child, or whatever, and the kid fixed the MP and asked him why he was laughing ... And what I thought I saw in the MP was him realising, 'Look, we may think we make the agenda but what we have here is people who wanted to make the agenda themselves and not just plugging into some sort of agenda that I already have ...' What they [politicians] come across is people who have thought out an agenda and maybe a solution and they don't seem to be used to this.'¹⁷⁷

Alinsky had said that political actions should be enjoyable and capture the imagination of those involved. Peter Welton, a former member of the National Youth Theatre, and one of the first community organisers to work for COF, had considerable flair for this dramatic and improvisational side of facilitating actions to bring about change on an issue. On the edge of the Heath Town estate in Wolverhampton, there was a battery-breaking plant which the local community organisation was trying to get relocated because research had shown high levels of lead in the surrounding environment. Welton had managed to get some local TV coverage to increase publicity on the issue and had brought along some gas masks for local residents to wear to dramatize the issue in front of the cameras at the plant gates. As the TV crew approached, Welton noticed a dead cat lying in the gutter. Although it had most likely died of more natural causes, Welton insisted that the cameras film the cat along with the residents in masks.

¹⁷⁷ Sichel, S, MFS, *London Citizens and London Clergy: Exploring the influence of Community Organising on the Ministries of Clergy in London*, Kings College, London. 2011, p.36.

Community Organising and the urban missional renaissance

As the 1970s gave way to the neo-liberal economics and politics of the era of Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher, an era we continue to inhabit, Christian responses to the plight of the urban poor and the vocation of Christians to the inner-city has flourished. The *Faith in the City* report of 1985 and the Church Urban Fund which followed it were Anglican stimulants to what has been a broader ecumenical renaissance in which community organising has been but one example of a more widespread revival in urban social discipleship and mission, some examples of which now follow.¹⁷⁸

Ashram: Community in the City

Ashram Community has been one such initiative in the field of intentional urban Christian community. Founded in 1967 by the Methodist minister John Vincent, Ashram describes itself 'as a prophetic new form of Christian community related to urban needs.'¹⁷⁹ Now concentrated in Sheffield, between the 1970's and the 1990's Ashram established Community Houses in seven cities and grew a wider community of eighty adults committed to an urban discipleship in which homes and projects were started within a communal ethos in which 'we try to make life decisions about jobs, vocations, use of money, the places we live and work, and political action, in relation to the Gospels.'¹⁸⁰

Evangelicals for Social Justice

In the Church of England, Evangelicals are estimated to comprise 30% of the current active membership in the parishes and evangelical interest in social justice has been a growing area of witness ecumenically in the contemporary church. As Sam Thomas writes, 'in contemporary Christianity many evangelicals are currently coming to terms with how they might best couple together practice and theology. At the heart of this challenge is an attempt to authentically interconnect sharing the good news of Jesus Christ, his life and resurrection, with the task of displaying this good news through progressive practices in local communities.'¹⁸¹ A rising number of evangelicals are not content simply to have a faith, there is a growing movement to show that faith locally in incarnational practices of pastoral care and social action for justice. This is an international phenomenon which Bielo helpfully explores in his study of emerging evangelicals in the North American context.¹⁸² According to Bielo, Emerging evangelicals 'make kingdom theology a central part of the cultural

¹⁷⁸ For a sense of this momentum and its resultant impact on theological reflection see, Northcott, M, ed., *Urban Theology: A Reader*, (London, Cassell, 1998).

¹⁷⁹ Website of The Ashram Christian Community in the UK, www.ashramcommunity.org.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid. See also, Vincent, John, *A Lifestyle of Sharing*, (Ashram Press, 2009).

¹⁸¹ Paul Cloke, Justin Beaumont and Andrew Williams, *Working Faith: Faith-Based Organizations and Urban Social Justice*, (Milton Keynes, Paternoster, 2013), p.66.

¹⁸² Bielo, James S, *Emerging Evangelicals, Faith, Modernity, and the Desire for Authenticity*, (New York, New York University Press, 2011). See also Beaumont, J, and Cloke, P, eds., *Faith-Based Organisations and exclusion in European cities*, (Bristol, Policy Press, 2012).

logic of being missional'¹⁸³ Examples of this movement in the British context would include the Eden Project pioneered in Manchester and now active in other cities in which evangelism and active discipleship targeted at young people has been successfully pioneered by volunteer groups who partner with a local host church in a community which they commit to living in and helping to transform.¹⁸⁴

Church Action on Poverty

Church Action on Poverty, CAoP was founded in 1982 by the Roman Catholic John Battle MP and was designed to be a 'cross-denominational, non-partisan organisation aimed at educating and mobilising the church in response to the increasing levels of unemployment and poverty during the 1980s. Its vision today remains largely unchanged: to mobilise grass roots activism in the church and to give a voice to the poor to speak out against economic injustice.'¹⁸⁵ CAoP employs approximately nineteen staff. They have used lobbying activities and 'participatory forums 'in which the voices of those experiencing poverty are used to present a powerful counter narrative with which to challenge the dominant explanations of poverty by those in government.'¹⁸⁶ CAoP working with Community Pride, a Manchester church alliance and Oxfam, received government funding to develop work on Participatory Budgeting under the last Labour government. Participatory Budgeting, which originated in radical democratic experiments in urban centres in Brazil, facilitates local decision making on how public money is spent and invested. DOOD, (Debt On Our Doorstep) has been another campaign of CAoP which has seen some success in developing a code of practice for pay day loan companies and taken successful action on pay as you go utility firms who target those on low incomes, making them pay considerably more in the longer term for gas, electric, and TV, than those who can afford signing up for such services on standard rates. CAoP has developed an eclectic and collaborative approach to pursuing social justice in society which is perhaps most evident in its work with asylum seekers in which it has networked with National Catholic Refugee Forum, Churches Refugee Network, and the Churches Commission for Racial Justice.

What I suggest these missional examples share is a recognition that the church's witness within our present social and political circumstances requires more intentional and relational forms of Christian life and social engagement. A commitment to community now requires more attention to making relationships because the associative life of geographical territories beyond the home and work and friends has greatly deteriorated in many if not all areas today. Community is increasingly something that has to be made and re-made. Vincent's Ashram Community can be said to be premised on the notion that you have to choose to live

¹⁸³ Bielo, James S, *Emerging Evangelicals, Faith, Modernity, and the Desire for Authenticity*, (New York, New York University Press, 2011), p. 140.

¹⁸⁴ Baker, C. *The Hybrid Church in the City: Third Space Thinking*, (Aldershot, Ashgate, 2007), pp. 117-119.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., pp. 34-36.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 36.

communally in areas of need, and when you get there you have to work at sustaining a common form of life in which the connection between a gathered Christian community and addressing the social needs of an area has to be bridged by intentionally associative and practical behaviour. The emerging evangelicals creating faith networks and turning towards the kingdom dimensions of social justice are perhaps similarly recognising that an associative dimension to contemporary Christianity as in the wider society is not simply a given and is rather in short supply. The social organisation of traditional congregations and house churches are not able to mediate and sufficiently respond to the prophetic, communal, and justice streams of Christian faith which calls more loudly for associative and connective responses in a period in which alternatives to individualism and material consumption as socially normative ways of life need to be crafted. The development of Church Action on Poverty as a charity similarly suggests that the need to create more flexible, collaborative, and tactical approaches towards furthering social justice causes by the churches have been necessary to develop in a less solid and bureaucratic organisational culture. Forty years ago such a charity would have campaigned and developed its project work at the radical edge of the culture of community development. Advocacy for the poor and marginalised was at the core of CAoP's work in the late 1980s and 1990s and yet it has increasingly adopted more intentionally political practices in recent years. A campaigning and community development model of working has now been augmented by the employment of community organising techniques and in the case of Changemakers in Manchester, CAoP has founded an Alinskian peoples organisation crafted by organisers from PICO (Pacific Institute for Community Organizing) an American faith-based community organising network founded by Fr John Bauman S.J.

Conclusion: The associative as critique and seed bed of reconstruction

In tracing an intentional and relational dimension as common to the changing face of the missional initiatives I have given as examples, I think it is possible to say why it is that community organising has been achieving the impact it has not only through the work of London Citizens but as I have pointed out, also within the work of CAoP and perhaps even as a generationally influential model within the field of political work in the UK. Where community organising differs from other approaches to political work, social transformation, and the pursuit of social justice in society, is in its operant method, its emphasis upon the craft of association and the allied relational tactics it employs in its creation and sustaining of the work of locally networked political publics. If, as I have been arguing throughout, we live in an age of societal fragmentation and dissociation, then community organising's achievements have been more impressive than the actual scale of its existence as a charitable organisation in the voluntary sector precisely because it has become an effective political craft, a *metis*, a know-how, which in the life of its organisations has resisted the pressures towards public withdrawal through a shrewd tactical

deployment of a seasoned associative praxis and responsible action which has proved capable of producing new political achievements:

In democratic countries, the knowledge of how to form associations is the mother of all knowledge since the success of all the others depends upon it...In order to ensure that men remain or become civilised, the skill of association must develop and improve among them at the same speed as the spread of the equality of social conditions.¹⁸⁷

A Prophetic Politics

Community organising's proficiency in this craft of association and tactical political action in the English and now the British context has I think been particularly striking as a response to democratic and other associative deficits which have impacted social conditions in the churches as in wider society in the late twentieth century. Community organising's cultural significance for religion in England as well as for society has not as yet I suggest been sufficiently registered by otherwise important studies of its work by religious authors here.¹⁸⁸ Organising has both shown us what we have often been told, that despite our having the mother of parliaments, a democratic culture has never been a deep feature of society in England, and it has revealed in the success of its craft¹⁸⁹ the possibility of a generative future for an associative democratic stream of life in this country beyond the scope of what modest hopes there might have been for it as a small social movement when it first arrived. The experience of this politics has revealed both how alien to social experience in a UK context an associative democratic politics is, and how natural a home it can come to have within the practices of people of faith who remain facing outwards to each other and to the world about them and require

¹⁸⁷ De Tocqueville, Alexis, *Democracy in America*, (1835), (London, Penguin Books, 2003), p. 600.

¹⁸⁸ Bretherton has framed his work on organising firstly in an Augustinian theological perspective on Saul Alinsky, and in his study of London Citizens amassed a comprehensive theoretical and political analysis of the phenomenon of organising in which a 'consociationalist' view of organising is considered to best describe it. It could perhaps equally well be described in terms of the craft of association and what can be produced by it as I have done here. See, Bretherton, L, 'Augustine, Alinsky, and the Politics of the Common Good', *Christianity and Contemporary Politics: The Conditions and Possibilities of Faithful Witness* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), pp.71-96, Bretherton, L, *Resurrecting Democracy: Faith, Citizenship, and the Politics of a Common Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp.219-242. Austin Ivereigh's guide to CST and Community Organising is a clear presentation but does not explore the significance of organising in the wider ecclesial and socio-cultural context, Ivereigh, A, *Faithful Citizens: A Practical Guide to Catholic Social Teaching and Community Organising* (London: DLT, 2010). Christopher Shannahan's study of organising places it 'as an effective expression of postsecular movement politics' but he does not dwell on the cultural grip of a traditional ecclesial and bureaucratic organisational culture within the social order which to my mind intensifies the prophetic importance of this politics as an associative movement for the church and other social actors. See, Shannahan, C, *A Theology of Community Organizing: Power to the People* (London: Routledge, 2013), p.3.

¹⁸⁹ Herman, et.al., suggests that the success of London Citizens might 'lack transferability to other contexts', see, 'Spaces of postsecular engagement in cities', Agatha Herman, Justin Beaumont, Paul Cloke and Andres Walliser, in Justin Beaumont and Paul Cloke eds., *Faith-Based Organisations and exclusion in European cities*, (Bristol, Policy Press, 2012), p.67. This is plainly not the case given that there are several other organisations operating successfully in Britain, for example in Nottingham and in Cardiff and there are hundreds more operating in organising networks in the United States and other countries, all of which use the same associative practices and draw upon the same methodology to pursue progress on issues facing local communities.

new means for showing just how much they care about it. That communities of faith have been the back bone of its progress also suggests some hope for the continued importance of the associative spirit and the role of faith-based communities in the future of witness in a complex world which is still a matter of concern rather than of indifference to them.

This chapter has provided an outline of the history of community organising in the United States and in England. What has been unique in the history of community organising has been its interest in the potential of local congregations to act politically within plural social and religious conditions. In the next chapter, I will dig more deeply into what I think has been learnt from community organising in the UK, and particularly from an Anglican perspective.

My own journey with community organising as a priest in the Church of England has been a process in which Anglican social horizons and practices have been creatively interrupted and put to question in plural social and religious conditions, and through which and beyond which new prospects in social organisation have emerged ecumenically for the life of the churches acting as the body of Christ in new relational modes. It has demonstrated a politics both religious and secular whose agency has neither been imaginatively framed nor organisationally conditioned by the received politics of society and state and in that freedom it has created new trajectories for social and political engagement in the future.

Organising has been a prophetic movement for the church and other religious institutions in this regard. It has been prophetic not simply through its political action, but more importantly, in the longer term, in the degree to which it has enabled a prophetic ‘counter consciousness’¹⁹⁰ to emerge within the visible horizons of the church as an associative body in the world. For Brueggemann, prophetic vision arising from the tradition of Moses and the ministry of Jesus is deeper than the church’s action because it ultimately refers ‘to possibilities that are too radical for any historical community, either in terms of theological presupposition or in terms of societal implementation’.¹⁹¹ The prophetic imagination for Brueggemann is deeper than thought or action, but always understood in relation to the life of a historical community. For Anglicans, organising as a prophetic movement, has proved capable of interrupting, questioning, and re-orientating social and political agendas and action by the church, re-rooting them in the participation of local congregation in a way that has wider implications for how the national church’s life as a people might develop institutionally, democratically, and locally in future beyond historic forms of its societal and political relation to the social order.

¹⁹⁰ Brueggemann, W, *The Prophetic Imagination*, 2nd ed., (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), p.21.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p.22.

Chapter Three:

The Return of the Church as a Social and Political Body

Outline of the chapter

In chapter one I contextualised my research question – what could the urban church learn from community organising? – by reflecting on the breakdown of the societal conditions of Anglican ministry in inner-urban areas, as illuminated by sociological, pastoral, historical, and social and political commentaries. In chapter two I gave a history of Saul Alinsky's people's organisations in the United States and in England and concluded by suggesting that there was a prophetic dimension to community organising in its ability to interrupt and re-orientate dimensions of the church's life as a body in the world.

In this concluding chapter I reflect on some of the issues raised by community organising that connect with themes in ecclesiology, political theology, and social theory, and discuss some issues in the relationship between community organising and Anglican social theology and ethics. I explore some aspects of how the church as an embodiment, a material and spatial people in society has been addressed in the work of De Lubac, Taylor, Davies, and Cavanaugh. I then draw these perspectives into my reflection on the impact of community organising in which I suggest that it is an associative deficit in the sociality of the church both internally and externally which accounts for the loss of its creative power and witness as a people in the world.

Secondly I explore the worshipping community as the locus out of which ethics as pastoral and political action should flow more visibly as a milieu in which failure to affirm and school direct pastoral and political ministries is a consequence of the loss of a sensibility of creative tension between the people of God and other social bodies and sketch how community organising can assist the church locally to revalue its own agency and relational powers as a body in urban and plural ecclesial and social conditions.

Thirdly, and more briefly, I explore organising from some perspectives in contemporary social theory and then in relation to some aspects of Anglican social ethics and political thought.

I conclude this thesis by suggesting some directions the Church of England acting ecumenically might take to sustain community organising as a fruitful practice for the future witness of the church, other faith communities, and secular groups and institutions that might wish to work together. I also suggest a change in the direction

of institutional leadership prompted by the experience of organising that the church might take, and through which the church as the People of God might be better served in their discipleship

Embodiment as an ecclesiological problem

In this thesis I argue that the practice of a local form of associative and democratic politics has enabled, for those who have participated in it, a renewed sensibility of the local church's existence as a social and political body in the world. I began chapter one by using Raymond William's picture of the social landscape to suggest that we were at a juncture where the abstraction of society and actual relationships was under pressure and that a transition in our understanding of this relationship was experienced acutely by clergy and laity living in diverse and fragmented urban environments. A local sense of belonging to a particular church community, a congregation, as Taylor's analysis has argued, has become more important to Christian identity than societal forms of belonging that an older and more corporate sense of church and society had once mediated. I argued that this constituted a loss of power and influence societally for churches no longer close to the heart of social orders and suggested the limitations of sociological interpretations of religious change in society for the church, if the church's own horizons as a body were not considered as in some ways distinct from those of a wider society.

The erosion of the church's place in society as a result of social change and institutional decline and in a context in which the culture and power of the market exerts a great influence over the values and social organisation of state and society constitutes a challenge to the church in its internal and external relationships as a social body and within a wider and plural social order. A historic church and society conception in which the church as a public body was grafted into a corporate social order has withered as an actual and imaginative container for its institutional life in the nation and belongs now more to the past than to the present and future. Such a context is not only negative for the church; it can serve a useful purpose in directing the church to primary questions about its own sociality as a body in contemporary conditions.

Embodiment and disembodiment

Reflection on the church as an ecclesial body, in relation to the historical development of societies and states in modernity, was the subject of significant reflection in 20th-century ecclesiology. Within Catholic ecclesiology, Henri de Lubac's *Corpus Mysticum*¹⁹² has been a major influence upon our understanding of the historical development of a dichotomy between the Eucharist and the ecclesial assembly, in the emergence of modern conceptions of the church as a social body in

¹⁹² de Lubac, H, *Corpus Mysticum: The Eucharist and the Church in the Middle Ages*, trans. Gemma Simmonds, with Richard Price and Christopher Stephens, eds. Hemming, L. P, and Parsons, S. P, (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007).

the world. This modern conception of the church in the world, de Lubac argued, emerged through a complex process of historical decline in pre-modern understandings of the present action of Christ in the Eucharistic assembly. An understanding of God's action in the Eucharist prevailed in the early Christian centuries so deeply that reference to the church as a body outside Christ's life in the Eucharist was unthinkable. De Lubac sought:

... a return to the sacramental origins of the 'mystical body' in order to steep ourselves in it ... a return to the mystical sources of the church. The church and the Eucharist are formed by one another day by day: the idea of the Eucharist and the idea of the church must promote one another mutually and each be rendered more profound by the other.¹⁹³

For de Lubac, a strong mystical sense of the communal dimension of Eucharistic action slowly weakens as the modern period approaches, and the church increasingly comprehends its life in more rational and secular terms in which a split between Eucharistic action and the community of the church as a theological body in the world takes place. The political, as a secular authority and space distinct from the horizons of the church comes to inhabit the theological grounds of the church and the mystical loses its mediating force.

De Lubac's work on the development of a more rational and less sensibly participative understanding of the church as a communal embodiment in the world appears to be at work behind Charles Taylor's recent description of what he calls a process of 'excarination', a process of ecclesial disembodiment, insofar as this process can be said to be one in which the horizons of secular societies and states come to colonise communal dimensions of the ecclesia as a body in the world.¹⁹⁴ Taylor describes this movement, one he suggests is resisted by the great world religions, as 'the transfer of our religious life out of bodily forms of ritual, worship and practice, so that it comes more and more to reside in the head':

The issue here is not how many positive invocations of the body we hear; these abound in many forms of atheist materialism, as also in more liberal Christianity. The issue is whether our relation to the highest – God for believers, general morality for Aufklärer – is mediated in embodied form, as was plainly the case for parishioners 'Creeping to the Cross' on Good Friday in pre-reformation England. Or looking towards what moves us to the highest, the issue is to what degree our highest desires, those which allow us to discern the highest, are embodied, as the pity captured in the New Testament verb 'splangnizesthai' plainly is.¹⁹⁵

Such an embodied dimension to contemporary Christianity may be widely missing in large parts of white Western and European church life in the way that Taylor describes, but Taylor's account of an 'excarinated' church would not be such an accurate description of the worship of the globally preponderant and multi-ethnic church of the poor in today's world. I remember vividly conducting my first Good

¹⁹³ Ibid., p.260.

¹⁹⁴ Taylor, C, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London, England.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007). pp. 613-615.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., p.613.

Friday Liturgy in an inner-south London church of diaspora African and Caribbean members, many carrying experiences of dislocation and loss, at how the assembly shook and sobbed as they sang and venerated the cross. This visceral sense of *splangnizesthai* is also frequently evident at funerals in the Caribbean community.

Transformation Theology

There is some correspondence between Taylor's discussion of 'excarnation' and Oliver Davies and others working on the project of 'transformation theology'.¹⁹⁶ Davies and colleagues argue for a re-orientation of theology back into the world to counter the impact of cosmological change upon the church's understanding of its transforming and embodied horizons flowing from Christ's exalted place in heaven as the Ascended Christ. Davies reminds us that medieval maps of the world included heaven and this was so because it was unquestionably thought that the earthly material world extended into the heavenly realms where the exalted Christ reigned in glory.¹⁹⁷ The loosening and erosion of such an understanding with the Copernican revolution has led inexorably through modernity to a heightening of the importance of the question of where Christ's ascended and transforming body can be found in the contemporary plural world of time and space? Davies sees the church's affirmation of the living and ascended Christ, once secured by the understanding of his place in heaven as guaranteeing his transforming presence at the centre of embodied life, as in need of theological rearticulation. Transformation theology argues that the worldly grounds of Christ's transforming embodiment are unsatisfactorily filled, for example by a 'faith subjectivism' in the influential theology of Karl Barth,¹⁹⁸ in which a future eschaton can distract us from Christ's transforming bodily presence to us in the world of the here and now, or in theologies of meaning at the borders of the intellect,¹⁹⁹ which can similarly prevent the where of Christ's 'disruptive' embodied mediation to us on the other.²⁰⁰ Davies, following Bonhoeffer,²⁰¹ seeks a re-orientated and rearticulated second-order theology at the service of 'our sensible and embodied existence' in the world. Davies and the transformation theologians see their approach as capable of embracing

¹⁹⁶ For transformation theology see: Davies, O, et al, *Transformation Theology: Church in the World* (London: T&T Clark, 2007); Janz, P. D, *The Command of Grace: A New Theological Apologetics* (London: T&T Clark, 2009); Davies, O, *Theology of Transformation: Faith, Freedom, and the Christian Act* (Oxford: OUP, 2013).

¹⁹⁷ Davies, O, *Theology of Transformation: Faith, Freedom, and the Christian Act* (Oxford: OUP, 2013), pp.11-36.

¹⁹⁸ Davies, O, et al, *Transformation Theology: Church in the World* (London: T&T Clark, 2007), p.75.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., p.110.

²⁰⁰ Ibid., p.57.

²⁰¹ Davies, O, *Theology of Transformation: Faith, Freedom, and the Christian Act* (Oxford: OUP, 2013), p.68. Davies suggests that the 'pro me' orientation of Bonhoeffer's 'who is Jesus Christ for us today?' now needs to take the form of 'where' rather than 'who' is Jesus Christ for us today, to reflect the changed position of the church in a globally connected, plural, multi-faith world, in which Christianity cannot ignore that it is one faith among many. This is a context for Christianity that Bonhoeffer's world does not share to the same degree.

philosophical, ethical, ethnographic and other practical forms of theology, including liberation theology, as partners in the transformation approach.

There are, however, questions raised by the standpoint of this project. Is the transforming presence of Christ not mediated to us primarily in ways that are somewhat resistant to the mediational domain of second-order accounts? Are not scripture and liturgy and the sacramental as mediations of the divine not primarily experienced in the action of the worshipping assembly as the primary site Christian revelation in the world? Davies distinguishes between a first and second order of theologies, not in terms of their value in a theological division of labour, but in terms of the jobs they have to do in a common enterprise. The re-interpretation of doctrine becomes important for Davies for interpreting the church's bodily existence in the contemporary world of time and space. But does this overestimate the presently formative degree to which doctrine shapes the actual life of the church as the People of God in its assemblies on the ground? Fletcher argues that it is precisely because doctrine, in his case social understandings of the Trinity, cannot reach the contemporary church or world with any friction, that suggests that doctrine has become detached from its *topos* in the sociality of the church, which is why other approaches to the church as a political sociality needs to be explored.²⁰²

Reflection on the politics I have been exploring by clergy participants in my research, could result in the recalling of political events in which a scriptural imagination, kingdom moments, and doctrines of Incarnation and Trinity could suddenly burst into life.²⁰³ A sensibility of a return, re-emergence, or sensible reassembling of social and political imagination mediated through the church's political performance. A performance perhaps of a lost or atrophied dimension of the church's sociality in the modern world? This at least suggests that the sociality of the church and the formation of doctrine might be more closely entwined than the second-order doctrinal interpretation Davies' schema allows for. Can a theology that locates itself as a second-order reflection mediate transformation sufficiently without the life of the church as a people being seen as the primary and generative grounds of theological horizons including doctrinal ones? There is at least the question to be asked here, as to whether doctrinal interpretation in conversation with developments in other fields of study, in locating Christian revelation in a metaphysical location distanced from the practices of the church is but is but a reassertion of the ancient idealist strategy of separating knowing, from being and doing. Many church members might be seen to interpret their faith in terms of a 'faith subjectivism' or categories of meaning that Davies and colleagues seek to move beyond. But is this perhaps a consequence of a general thinning of a sensibility of the church as a distinctive and formative sociality in our ordinary experience of it? The worry of the placing of transformation theology as a second-order discipline lies in considering

²⁰² Fletcher, P, *Disciplining the Divine: Toward an (Im) political Theology* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2009), p.3.

²⁰³ Sichel, S, MFS, *London Citizens and London Clergy: Exploring the influence of Community Organising on the Ministries of Clergy in London*, Kings College, London, 2011, p.26.

doctrine where it perhaps once was located in the life of the church, rather than exploring the conditions of the absence of such a mediation for the life of the church as a body and as a transformative theology some inclusion of examples as to where this might be seen. Can transformation theology develop without critically locating this theology within the church's primary sociality in worship and life, as the key grounds for reconstructing understandings of the transforming presence of its Lord?

Time and space

Transformation theology also seeks explication in the contemporary, not the pre-modern, world of time and space – but it is not clear whose interpretation of time and space this theology sides with. Is there not a growing awareness of the salience of the church's practice of a distinct interpretation of time and space in its life in the world? Agamben, for example, whose political theory is sympathetic to the church, criticises the church precisely for its abandonment of a practice of time as *kairos*.²⁰⁴ The church usually thinks of the *eschaton* as an event to take place in the future, at the end of time. Agamben argues that for St Paul the time of the end of time, is the time of the ending of time, a pulse within time as duration. For Paul the spatio-temporality of the church within which its life takes place, in Pauline terms, is *kairos* time, which should prevent the church's total accommodation to the ordinary time and space of the world as duration. Transformation theology is being developed collegially and this is perhaps its greatest strength. As a sustained exercise of theological conversation, the sociality of theology as practical and theoretical reason in community might re-emerge. This may be the key to its future development: the degree to which it can relocate theology as a shared conversational practice back within the primary sociality of the church.

Issues around embodiment, and of the inescapably social dimensions of embodiment for the church, are themes in each of these thinkers' writing, and many others could have been given as examples. De Lubac explores the historical disintegration of a communal Eucharistic body and the development of the church as a more secularised social and political body. Taylor notes a loss of density in the church as a collective body in its passage to a contemporary context in which ecclesial identity comes to reside more in the head rather than as mediated through the sensible and embodied experience of the Christian assembly. Davies and the transformation theologians develop a theological reception of embodiment in a reintegrated view of the world as a mind-body continuum in response to the loss of the Ascended Christ's place in heaven, as securing the bodily grounds of the church's earthly pilgrimage. Each would probably agree that from the first the church appears as sociality in the world in what we now designate as social and political dimensions, insofar as it was a body of people that acted out of a new way to inhabit and envisage the world in relation to the righteous purposes of the God revealed in Jesus of Nazareth. A

²⁰⁴ See the brief but powerful essay delivered as an address in Paris Cathedral by Agamben, in, Giorgio Agamben, *The Church and the Kingdom* (London: Seagull Books, 2012).

convergence in these thinkers on the importance of embodiment can be seen as sharing a common approach in which there is a two-fold account of both loss, variously accounted for, and an affirmation of the church as an embodiment. Whatever the losses, theological and institutional, and the pitfalls and betrayals of embodiment in the church's history and presence as a people, 'embodiment' as an interpretive locus remains crucial for theological thinking that takes the earthly life of God in Christ as foundational for the church's theological reflection.

Community organising and ecclesial embodiment

What the practices of community organising suggest in the context of this discussion is that the contemporary church's problems with embodiment have foundationally to do with a loss of social, communal and associative dimensions of its life as a body, both internally and externally in the modern world. In the conclusion to my study of clergy engaged in community organising, I suggested that the practices of this politics has opened spaces in which something appeared to be missing from the church's discernment of its life in the world, which has now become more tangible through an immersion in these practices. Membership of the church has emerged as capable of being practiced and thought, inhabited and imagined differently, and this sensibility has seemingly returned through an immersion in associative political practices which had cast light back on these often marginal features of communities of faith. What I suggest had happened, especially for those from traditions in which the church as a body has an importance in the mediation of Christian faith, is that those who engaged in community organising had been given a clearer sense of how their ecclesial community might itself be a body and how this sense of being ecclesial might point towards revived forms of being ecclesial in the midst of contemporary urban conditions. A practical method for making local, ecumenical, and diverse political publics that act on issues of justice and seek goods in common had awakened a capacity for clergy and laity alike to have a clearer intimation of a dimension of their membership of the church as a temporal and spatial body in the world. A new discernment of the church as a worshiping and pastoral and political agency had become available to ecclesial participants.

The narrative of this thesis has been premised on the slow death of a societal church and the emergence of new prospects and vision facilitated by the practices of a minor tradition of democratic politics. De Lubac saw an increasing politicisation of the church in its temporal horizons as a disaster for its life as a mystical and communal body in the world. Community organising is a practice of politics, but it is not a politics, in terms of its initiating agency and practice, of the received politics operative in the existing social and political order of a secular state, which de Lubac saw as colonising the church during the Middle Ages.

A central theme in contemporary ecclesiology is concerned with issues around the church's ethical, social, and political embodiment, and follows and develops de Lubac's work on the changes in the church's conception of its life as a social and

political body in society. As Pecknold²⁰⁵ narrates these developments, the pre-modern church's sense of the body politic is foundational to the rise and imagination of secularised conceptions of modern nation states. The title and themes of Cavanaugh's work *Migrations of the Holy*²⁰⁶ is an example of the influence of this narrative, in which an originally theological conception of a communal whole 'migrates' and in Cavanaugh's view is corrupted in modern secular instantiations of the state. What I am suggesting, in the light of the politics of community organising, is that its practices can return a pluralistic and radically democratic prospect to the church's own existence as a sociality in the world. The politics of organising are not party politics or the politics of governance in the state. Organising's scale and reliance upon interaction with local congregations, I suggest, can mediate to the ecclesia a return of communal dimensions to their local existence which can flow from their living as ecclesia and which are both distinct and ethically interactive with existing social and political arrangements. Such a prospect perhaps suggests some healing of a historically evolved and societally instantiated split between the theological and the political, with the 'political' now standing for the church as the ethical outworking of the pastoral commitments of the worshiping community socially. This is what I think Bretherton is articulating when he writes:

What community organising represents is a means for reconstituting, from the ground up, a *sensus communis*, which can then form the basis of a practical rationality on which shared judgements can be made. It does this through assembling a 'middle ground' out of the existing traditions and customs that have poured into the city.²⁰⁷

A generous pastoral tradition within the Church of England, responsive to the wider community without any contemporary desire, or indeed capacity to control or govern it, would appear to be a culture of church well suited to encouraging community organising as an ecumenical project facilitating a recrafting of such a *sensus communis* in contemporary urban conditions. In doing so, it could perhaps be seen as reinterpreting elements of its own theological and political history as a church with social horizons, in which seeking agreement between different viewpoints through reason (in the case of community organising, an active and associative, rather than isolated exercise of practical reason, both sacred and secular) has some continuity albeit in a radically flattened and horizontal mode with the sociability of the reason seen as an important source of authority in Anglican identity since the time of Hooker.

A story from the culture of the basic ecclesial communities is of a family who had defunct car parked in the street, which they would visit weekly. They would sit in the car and look at a scrapbook full of photographs of all the people, places, and adventures that they had shared together in the past when the car had been running.

²⁰⁵ Pecknold, C. C, *Christianity and Politics: A Brief Guide To The History* (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2010).

²⁰⁶ Cavanaugh, W. T, *Migrations of the Holy: God, State, And The Political Meaning of the Church* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2011).

²⁰⁷ Ibid., p.190.

Then they would get out of the car and go home until they repeated the ritual the following week. The church in this story is pictured as a stationery vehicle that no longer serves as a generative means by which the People of God can have new adventures, meet new people, generate new stories, and create a common life and history together. In our context such a story suggests the challenges faced by the death of a societal church and its institutional location at the cultural heart of social orders and the need for new forms of ecclesial embodiment in this marginal condition in a changed social and political landscape. As a movement, community organising has demonstrated an ability to facilitate some renewal of a sensibility of the church as a communal social and political body. The practices of community organising are political. Their aim is to build local political publics that interact peaceably and lawfully, principally with actors in the market and state, to improve the lives of the members of the institutions and communities they represent. A hopeful consequence of participation in this politics for church members however can be to heighten and renew a sensibility of the church as a theologically embodied sociality, capable and called locally to ministries of pastoral care and political action, as well as to be communities of worship and teaching.

A paideia and a pedagogy

If one of the meanings of education is inductive – to draw out – then organising can be said to be an educative movement, a school providing a *paideia* in which the local church can be ‘drawn out’ to enact social and political dimensions of its life as a visible community in the world.²⁰⁸ Through being so drawn out it can rediscover aspects of its own life and concern which have migrated from its own perceptions into other areas of life in society. At the same time organising can effectively provide a *pedagogy*, a political schooling in attentiveness to the particular in the unfolding of events and the passing on of a practical wisdom in the understanding of political engagement. Through a set of structured and structuring political practices in which societal horizons are disembedded and decolonised, social and political agency returns to the perception and agency of lay and clerical members of local ecclesial assemblies. Those who belong to the local units of the body of Christ are assisted to learn and live more deeply into their Christian identities as a distinctive people living in the world in which latent political dimensions of the church’s witness can be re-activated. For congregations, the practices of conversation, assembly, and responsible action and reflection, promoted by organising, prove capable of mediating the return of a sensibility to the body of Christ as a spatio-temporal body living communally amidst differences in the fragmented social conditions of the contemporary world. Hauerwas and Wells suggest that many Christians:

²⁰⁸ ‘*Paideia*’ in its Ancient Greek sense was education directed towards the active public and political life of a citizen. ‘The goal of education for the Greeks was a shaping of the essential quality of a human being, his political character.’ See Jaeger, W, *Paideia: The Ideals Of Greek Culture*, Vol. I. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1945), p.xxvi.

... have a thriving life of personal devotion, an active life within a worshipping community, and an engaged life fulfilling a range of public roles in the work place, neighbourhood and family, but comparatively seldom do lay Christians have an equally developed way of bringing these three parts of their lives together.²⁰⁹

What the practices of community organising can partially remedy in such conditions, which today are as much clerical as lay, is a way of bringing these parts back together into the disaggregated horizons of ecclesial belonging which Hauerwas and Wells describe as widespread amongst contemporary believers. The practices of organising can return a sensibility to the church of its life as a temporal, and importantly, lay as well as clerical body in the world. Ecclesiology has been widely preoccupied in recent decades with articulating the distinctiveness of the church as a body in the world distinguished by the practice of worship. It has not, however, been so successful in articulating the social and political dimensions of the social body that worships. Worship, as the church's primary purpose for the action of gathering and assembly, remains nonetheless the primary site to begin any exploration of the church's life in the world.

Church and world through worship

Wannenwetsch describes an influential orientation in contemporary ecclesiology which focuses on the distinctiveness of the church in its existence as a worshipping community in the world.²¹⁰ He describes this interpretation as 'the double becoming of the world in worship'. In this approach it is in worship 'that the Church first appears as a Church which both 'produces – brings about – the world and is challenged by it'.²¹¹ Its 'contrast' element with the world is grounded in worship, and worship must include the birth of the world in two distinct senses. Firstly, the world becomes:

... the totality of the created beings and their activity that do not praise the Creator. This first becoming is a negative distinction, but it is a pre-condition of a second, salutary and in the real sense political becoming in which the world remains world, or rather, it now only truly becomes world, it becomes a world that is no longer hostile to God and now reflects the Creator's original will ... In and through worship the transformation of the world into the world takes place, the transformation of the alleged eternal kingdom into a *saeculum*, a temporal existence.²¹²

In characterising this approach in recent ecclesiology, in theologians such as Stanley Hauerwas for example, Wannenwetsch provides his own careful analysis of the worship of the church as constituting a political public distinct from, and yet open to, engagement with other publics in the wider world. His presentation of the ethical and political life of the church, however, as a public constituted through its political worship, is less persuasive than his delineation of the church's political publicness as a worshipping body. In this weakness Wannenwetsch is not alone, for perhaps most

²⁰⁹ Hauerwas, S, and Wells, S, eds., *The Blackwell Companion to Christian Ethics* (Malden, MA and Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), p.4.

²¹⁰ Wannenwetsch, B, *Political Worship* (Oxford: OUP, 2004), pp.247-256

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.249.

²¹² *Ibid.*, p.249.

contemporary ecclesiology suffers from having stronger accounts of the distinctiveness of the church as a public worshipping body than it does of accounts of how that distinctive body might interact publically and politically with other bodies in the wider world. The church's life as a body formed and reformed through its worship is often acknowledged as giving rise to social and political horizons which can overlap with the wider world in the *saeculum*. More difficult to find, however, is guidance for inhabiting such horizons as an ecclesial body, without surrendering the importance of the ways in which the church is a decisively distinct public, the true *res publica*. In this sense, contemporary ecclesiology can be said to suffer from an underdeveloped interpretation of its life in the world. The distinction of the church as a body from other social bodies, and the importance of the divine in limiting the pride and ambition of human action, seems to function as a brake on contemplating more positive forms of social discipleship for the fear of losing ecclesial identity through a conformity, witting or unwitting, to practices and interpretations provided by the *saeculum*. The danger to the church of losing its identity as ecclesia in the world, the danger of idolatry, is real, but the lack of more constructive work on how the church might faithfully engage as a church in the world without losing its identity results in a situation in which, when it comes to living out their faith in the world, the church as a social body is left to its own, usually individual devices.

In the Catholic community, despite the tradition of Catholic Social Teaching, church members lack practical mediations by which such teaching can be enacted and achieve some friction in the everyday world.²¹³ This places the church as a people, predominantly lay and poorer people in today's world, with little practical encouragement as to how their lives as participant members of Christ's body can be faithfully shaped to serve God and neighbours in the world beyond the church's life as a worshipping community. At its worst this makes the church a devotional enclosure. In the Church of England we pray: 'Send us out in the power of the Spirit, to live and work to your praise and glory'. A prayer used at the end of the Catholic Mass – 'Make us become what we have celebrated and received' – is a call to the church to continue to become what the 'we' now is. But in what ways does the church guide and encourage its 'us' and 'we', as the body of Christ it is becoming, to continue this becoming as a 'we' after the dismissal?

The church as tripod of scripture, liturgy and ethics

The influential liturgical theologian Louis-Marie Chauvet pictures the church as a dynamic tripod of scripture, liturgy, and ethics.²¹⁴ For the church to continue its form of life as a body each mediation of the church's life is respected in its distance from

²¹³ This is the bereft mediational space, rather like the car in the parable from the BEC's, in which Ivereigh situates his presentation of community organising as a vehicle for putting Catholic social teachings into practice. See Ivereigh, A, *Faithful Citizens: A Practical Guide to Catholic Social Teaching and Community Organising* (London: DLT, 2010).

²¹⁴ Chauvet, L-M, *Symbol and Sacrament: A Sacramental Reinterpretation of Christian Existence* (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1995), p.176.

the others and that no single pole should dominate. He writes: 'Faith lives only from the space between the three poles.'²¹⁵ This space should not be collapsed by the temptations of an immediacy in which a particular pole is fixed upon as the most important, as for example might occur if in the ethical mode it was thought that going to church did not matter and that only works of charity were important. '[The] element Sacrament,' according to Chauvet, 'acts as a symbol for the passage from the letter toward the body.'²¹⁶ The liturgy 'is the powerful pedagogy where we learn to consent to the presence of the absence of God who obliges us to give him a body in the world, thereby giving the sacraments their plenitude in "the liturgy of the neighbour"''.²¹⁷

The relation between liturgy and ethics, Chauvet believes, is and should remain an important area of 'tension' for the church. In writing of the importance of the ethical pole in his structure of mediations, he states, 'The ritual story at each Eucharist, retelling why Jesus handed over his life, sends all Christians back to their own responsibility to take charge of history in his name.'²¹⁸ However, in contrast to what Chauvet has to say of scripture and liturgy, he writes almost nothing about how the ethical pole of the church's life is to be enacted. Understanding how and where this new body is inhabited as a distinctive sociality in the world beyond the site of worship is a threshold that challenges much contemporary ecclesiology. This challenge confronts the church acutely in urban, plural, fragmented, and economically divided social conditions, because in such contexts the church-world relationship is a 'double becoming' of a world in its plurality. The church-world relationship and the threshold between liturgy and ethics becomes a question of the church's face-to-face relationship with a peopled diversity both within and beyond the church's boundaries. Pluralism is descriptive of the actual social conditions in which the church finds itself.

Wannenwetsch suggests that it is dangerous to speak of building a bridge between the public of the church and other publics because the church's setting in the world of post-Christendom signals that the church is no longer in the business of extension or constructing a Christian society.²¹⁹ Similar misgivings have been expressed by Cavanaugh in regard to some forms of the politics of community organising that I am discussing here.²²⁰ There can be a tendency within some cultures of community organising to imply that the church's involvement in this politics signifies the church's territorial extension as a body, a re-claiming of lost ground as a public *viz a viz* other publics. As Cavanaugh rightly points out, this would suggest that the

²¹⁵ Ibid., p.40.

²¹⁶ Ibid., p.263.

²¹⁷ Ibid., p.265.

²¹⁸ Ibid., p.261.

²¹⁹ Wannenwetsch, B, *Political Worship* (Oxford: OUP, 2004), p.265.

²²⁰ Cavanaugh, W. T, *Theopolitical Imagination: Discovering the Liturgy as a Political Act in an Age of Global Consumerism* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2002).

church is not already a public, the true *res publica* in Augustine's terms.²²¹ The church does not need to become public in this sense because it has always been constituted as one. Cavanaugh reiterates the church's public political identity as a citizenship of heaven. However, I suggest that it is precisely a widespread lack of recognition of the church's own publicness as a body which is a pressing issue for ecclesiology generally and a central issue in Cavanaugh's own ecclesiological thought.²²²

Combatting the privatisation of the church and helping to build up its public life as a contribution to a *sensus communis*, while not competing with other publics or desiring to govern or dominate public space is something the church can learn from through the practices of community organising.

The disappearance of tension between church and world, liturgy and ethics

As we have seen, Chauvet describes the passage of the life of the Christian body from liturgy to ethics as one marked by tensions between the poles of its existence in which the church was not to lose the scriptural and liturgical poles of its identity in its ethical engagements with a wider world. I want to suggest that what Chauvet refers to as a tension in the space between liturgy and ethics is not widely experienced as such by the church. Even the tensional spaces between scripture and liturgy highlighted by Chauvet are unlikely to be understood as such by the laity. It would be more accurate to say that the church usually exists with little awareness of such tensions other than those more mental tensions between belief, unbelief, and different beliefs. The social forms of the life of historic churches do not widely mediate a sense of such tensions and neither does the church induct its people to live within such a tension in the ethical pole of their existence in the wider world. Those who compose the ecclesial body perhaps usually do not see their worshipping identity in that body as significantly shaping their activity and horizons as members of families, work places, or as members of society. It may even be the case that the tensions Chauvet delineates cannot be widely experienced as such, unless there is some restoration of a creative tension with other social bodies in the wider world that might focus the church's attention more closely on the distinctive identity it receives as a community through the action of worship.

Agamben and the lack of tension

Recent political theory has perhaps shed more light on the presence or absence of 'tension' in the church's ethical life in the world than recent theological writing. In Agamben's essay *The Church and the Kingdom*,²²³ which I discussed in the first chapter, Agamben argued that a tension between the church and the world has been

²²¹ Cavanaugh, W, *Theopolitical Imagination: Discovering the Liturgy as a Political Act in an Age of Global Consumerism* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2002), pp.70-71.

²²² For example it is the main topic in: Cavanaugh, W. T, *Torture and Eucharist: Theology Politics and the Body of Christ* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998).

²²³ Agamben, G, *The Church and the Kingdom* (London: Seagull Books, 2012).

erased because the church has lost its sense of living in its own messianic time, the time of the ending of time, as well as living within ordinary time, the time between Christ's first and second coming. Agamben suggests that a loss of messianic time within the church constitutes a loss of a sense of living in tension with the time of the world. The church has abandoned messianic time, a tensive time of sojourning, which allows for both a continuity with the time of the world and a different perspective upon it from which it can articulate an alternative reading of the world.

Agamben sees the performative, liturgical life of the church 'in which meaning coincides with a reality it produces', as mixing theology and politics 'as forms of hierarchical power'.²²⁴ The liturgical life of the church for Agamben reproduces a hierarchical field of power relations that enclose the church as an inoperative body in the world. For Agamben and for other neo-Marxist political theorists with at least an intellectual interest in the church,²²⁵ the church in a Pauline perspective is only a possible site of intellectual resistance to current economic and social conditions and is considered largely irrelevant as a political actor in a world. If, following Agamben's reasoning about messianic time, the church is dismissed as a body from worship to the time of the world, even if a messianic time has been evoked through scripture and the liturgy, then the church would seem to be largely at the mercy of the ordinary time and space of the world. Is there no way, however, for ordinary and messianic time to overlap more constructively in the life of the church in the world? For Jennings, a theologian much taken with the interest in St Paul in recent political philosophy, Pauline *pistis* 'designates a faithfulness that binds together persons in mutually beneficial action'.²²⁶ To live faithfully in Paul's perspective is not firstly a matter of belief, but rather fidelity to a particular form of sociality that is political rather than religious in form. For Agamben, this can be seen in the Pauline writings but is not understood by him to be a characteristic of the actually existing church in contemporary conditions. I suggest that a sociality of this kind, which turns outward towards the face of the neighbour, both internally and externally, in the community, can re-emerge for the church as it engages in the practices of community organising, through which, perhaps most vividly in plural social contexts, it is possible to see something of the Pauline ecclesial body as one in which the communal is mediated through its inclusion of differences. This is a more relational and democratic field of relations between bodies than the static and hierarchical symbolic power over the social and political body politic which Agamben argues the church still performs liturgically.²²⁷

²²⁴ Agamben, G, *The Kingdom And The Glory: For a Theological Genealogy of Economy and Government* (Stanford: Stanford University Press 2011), p.181.

²²⁵ For example, Badiou, A, *St Paul: The Foundation of Universalism* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003); Žižek, S, *The Fragile Absolute: or, why the Christian legacy is worth fighting for?* (London: Verso, 2000).

²²⁶ Jennings Jnr, T, *Outlaw Justice: The Messianic Politics of Paul* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2013), p.22.

²²⁷ Agamben, G, *The Kingdom And The Glory: For a Theological Genealogy of Economy and Government* (Stanford: Stanford University Press 2011), p.181.

Crafting an ecclesial social and political body

A reflection on a tension I have suggested as usually absent from much Christian life in the world as a people is presented in the teaching of community organising through a session on ‘the world as it is, and the world as it should be’. Organising proposes a tension between church and world as the experience of the church as a body of people living in both a horizon of faith, ‘the world as it should be’, and in the messy, complicated, and contingent world of the everyday, ‘the world as it is’. Wannenwetsch’s ‘double becoming of the world’ in worship is explored as a tension located in and between ecclesial members living in both the spaces of worship and the spaces of a pluralistic world.

Organising locates a contemporary theme in ecclesiology, in which the focus of believers’ identities in the world is considered in terms of the identity they receive in worship, as existing in an intermediary and lived threshold between the discursive terrains of church and world. Between church and world is proposed as the location of the church as a lay and clerical People of God. Such a location can subvert both forces in the church and in society and state which can function to inhibit the popular identity of a people with freedom to act both faithfully and realistically upon matters of concern in the everyday world. The church lives most of its life outside worship in the plural spaces of life, in which faith and the activities and mediations of a complicated world are constantly interacting. Much recent ecclesiology can be read as attributing a discursive density to the identity of the church out of all proportion to the church’s actual institutional power to inform and guide such mediations of the believing community’s lives lived in the spaces between the church and the multiple shaping powers of the world. It is this mobile and flexible location of our embodied presence socially to each other that organising proposes as the space in which the faithfulness of church allegiance and social engagement can be politically reconnected. The church’s existence socially in a tension between the church and the world, a spatio-temporality interpreted as inoperative by the thinkers attracted by the intellectual legacy of St Paul, is interestingly suggested through community organising as still capable of being enacted by the ecclesia.

Rounds

Exercising often atrophied dimensions of the church’s life as a social, public, and associative body in the world can be seen to run through the practices of community organising in its conversations, assemblies, common actions and reflection. An example of one such practice is that of rounds’, which take place at every gathering and in which everyone present at a meeting is given the opportunity to speak. The

practice of rounds can appear insignificant on first acquaintance. What is the point of taking a bus ride on a Tuesday night to sit in a children's play room at the back of a mosque with a small group of very different people to reflect together on a text, or a question, or an aspect of our social experience? What can become significant about such an activity, and the cooperative action it can lead to, is that the simplicity and seeming ordinariness can lead to something extraordinary, moving us towards cooperation in the midst of our differences. My example is taken from an interfaith perspective but the results are the same when a practice such as rounds is exercised among exclusively Christian participants. What can become palpable through this kind of association is an awareness of our capacity as human beings to discuss features of a world we have in common and in which we might take some action together. This hardly sound earth-shaking, but its novelty comes from the fact that contemporary experience in both church and society rarely affords the opportunity for such common activities.

Oscar Wilde famously quipped that the problem with socialism was that it would take too many evenings. Organising too requires a commitment of time. My experience, however, has been that the commitment of time has been amply offset by a renewed sense of connection and cooperation in which social imagination has been refreshed. Rounds evoke that human dimension of action that Hannah Arendt insisted was crucial to our preservation of the world as a place of plural and political inhabitation, free from the totalising impacts of society.²²⁸ Again, the living pluralism of these experiences can remind us of the Pauline identity we receive in Christ. Identity, as Lash notes, is often thought to be constituted through negations. 'We are those who are not "them", "the others:", those who are (potentially, at least) the enemy.'²²⁹ He goes on to describe Christianity 'as a project for the subversion of the truth of such an assertion' and suggests that the heart and centre of the gospel is that 'we have been made capable of friendship ... where the range of reference of "we" is, in principle, entirely unrestricted.'²³⁰

A practice such as rounds can mediate a theological insight in ways which the conventional activities of parish life often do not. As a Christian, rounds can be said to be a theological practice in the sense that the forms of religious and secular belonging constitutive of our experience of church and everyday life in society usually function as 'structures of substitution' rather than of mediation. Davies's reconstrual of the doctrine of the exalted Christ, speaks of 'religious structures of substitution', which 'contest Easter space and time' rather than mediate Easter space and time and bring us into conformity with it.²³¹ Such 'structures of substitution' can be said to operate in both church and society, insofar as our capacities for

²²⁸ Arendt, H, *The Human Condition*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

²²⁹ Lash, N, 'The Church in the State We're In' in Gregory Jones, L, and Buckley, J, eds., *Spirituality and Social Embodiment* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), pp.121-137.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*, 123-124.

²³¹ Davies, O, *Theology of Transformation: Faith, Freedom, and the Christian Act* (Oxford: OUP, 2013), p.89.

association and responsible action are not mediated by our religious and social institutions. These can block rather than mediate God's availability to us through their operative assumption that what we are about lies distantly from where we actually are. This can blind our sight of God's presence to us in our sight of each other and deaden the perception of the good we might accomplish if we had a little faith in our powers of cooperation.

Pluralisation

The church in racially, ethnically, and religiously plural urban settings cannot avoid pluralism as a social experience as it is encountered in congregations and communities. The church in such situations is constituted and contextualised by a pluralism that it cannot and should not wish to avoid. Where differences in history, class, race, and religion, constitute the milieu in which the church lives internally and externally, the church can have a heightened and foregrounded sense of the work of the Spirit as the one who calls us into a deeper fellowship beyond differences. For Butler, following Arendt, we cannot choose with whom to cohabit the earth: 'We must actively preserve the non-chosen character of inclusive and plural cohabitation: we not only live with those we never chose, and with whom we may feel no social sense of belonging, but we are obligated to preserve those lives and the plurality of which they form a part.'²³² She suggests that pluralism be understood not as a static but as a dynamic process. In William Connolly's term, it becomes a political process of pluralisation in which 'the task of affirming or even safeguarding plurality would also imply making new modes of pluralisation possible'. Such a dynamic, Butler argues, paradoxically makes belonging an 'undergoing of a dispossession of the category ... an exilic moment which disposes us ethically'.

I suggest that something of this exilic moment and ethical disposal, through a dispossession of our group identities in an active experience of pluralisation, can be mediated through the politics of organising. It is perhaps best seen in its political assemblies where pluralisation itself is enacted and celebrated socially and its ethical dimensions are brought into view. For Christians, an inclusive dynamic of pluralisation might be said to be integral to the church's vision as a body of salvation in the world, not only in Pauline terms, in which it can be said 'to suspend differences for the benefit of a radical universality',²³³ but in terms of the gospels in which the story of Jesus's own identification with outsiders heralds a movement which shapes a way to live in the world in which human identities are never to be seen as alien to a reception of God's just kingdom of love and compassion.

²³² Butler, J, 'Is Judaism Zionism?' in Mendieta, E, and Vanantwerpen, J, eds., *The Power of Religion in the Public Sphere* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), pp.70-91; Connolly, W, *The Ethos of Pluralization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005).

²³³ Badiou, A, *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism* (Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), p.74.

Perspectives from social theory

So far I have concentrated on an ecclesial emphasis to my interpretation of what the church might learn from community organising, but there are many ways in which the impact of community organising in returning a sensibility to the church of dimensions of its life as a body in plural social conditions can be illuminated by more secular perspectives. Giddens's concept of 'structuration'²³⁴ can helpfully suggest the way in which a fresh discernment of the church's life as a social embodiment takes place. Structuration is a cognitive tendency to attribute more coherence to society than really exists. Mainstream Anglican social theology tends to work implicitly with a coherent cognitive picture of the church's life and activity that could be said to have been restructured by community organising as a way to create an alternative perception of the church's social and political horizons. A new way to perceive the church's life in society. A new structuration, can co-exist with a still dominant structuration, while creatively and actively re-interpreting it. Organising's practices could be described in terms of a facilitation of Victor Turner's 'liminoid phenomenon',²³⁵ which he saw at work in religious pilgrimages through which the structural and anti-structural dimensions of social life are revealed and mirrored back into the perceptions of participants, perhaps oblivious of their everyday behaviours and interpretations of the world.

Latour writes of the public as a process of assembling in the same space both people and things. He points out that the names of many ancient parliaments retain this sense of a relation between the assembly and the 'thing'. 'Thing originally designated a certain type of archaic assembly.'²³⁶ 'The point of reviving this old etymology', he writes, 'is that we don't assemble because we agree, look alike, feel good, are socially compatible, or wish to fuse together, but because we are brought by divisive matters of concern into some neutral isolated place in order to come to some provisional makeshift (dis)agreement.'²³⁷ He suggests that politics needs to be re-envisioned as a process of assembling in the sense of practically making things public. In Latour's view, the politics of the *res publica* is about the *res*, about things as well as people and their deliberations together.

Making the connection between things and people is the proper work for Latour of a public assembly. Something of this sense of assembly and assembling is evident in the politics of organising in which the people suffering from an injustice, say migrant low-paid workers, bring their testimony into a space with the representatives

²³⁴ Giddens, A, *The Constitution of Society: Outline of a Theory of Structuration* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

²³⁵ Turner, V, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1978).

²³⁶ Latour, B, 'From Real Politic to Ding Politic or How to make things Public', in Latour, B, and Weibel, P, eds., *Making Things Public: Atmospheres of Democracy* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2005), p.22.

²³⁷ Ibid., p.23. I live and work in Brixton, south London. The "stane" of "brix", from which "Brixton" takes its name, refers to a large stone (no longer standing) at which representatives from an ancient Hundred would meet to discuss things.

of business or government agencies who might be able to address their issues. In this way a clear and reasonable representation of the particular things and persons involved are brought into the space of the assembly and made public. The practical (thing) dimension of assembly extends to the process of setting it up with all the materials this will involve – posters, sound-systems, scripts, gifts, information – which will make the assembly possible and all of which will be disassembled when the action of the assembly is over. The makeshift quality of this politics was alluded to during the course of my research when an interviewee remarked on the Heath-Robinson quality of community organising, by which he meant its makeshift quality in which the ropes and pulleys required for engaging in public life are often plainly in view.

Latour's thought may come to have greater importance in the analysis of organising in future. As a political practice of assembling and acting for social justice, Latour's thought is of some fertility in illuminating organising's radical democracy as the assembling of a piece meal, realist, and relational set of practices in which all who wish to can contribute in all their diversity. For Latour, as Levi Bryant summarises him in a forward to a theological interpretation of Latour's work, 'religion brings us back to the field of immanence and reveals the nearness of what is often too near to be seen...religion is not the work of escaping this world, it is the practice of returning to it.'²³⁸

Organising has been described in terms of third space.²³⁹ This interpretation sees the spatio-temporal dimensions of community organising as a politics, and its sacred and secular hybridity as a movement, and locates it among contemporary enactments of church as one in which the church's life as a lived space in the world is accented. Third-space thinking, which comes from the spatial theory of human geography, can provide a perspective on the grounded existence of the church as a sociality in the world in contrast to theologies, philosophies, and social theories that can function unhelpfully to distract attention from the church as a people living not just in the time of the world but also in its space. Such dimensions can be concealed in more philosophically idealist and hierarchical conceptions of the church's place in society and nation. Such views were highly influential within 19th and 20th-century Anglican social thought. In terms of Anglican social thinking, however, organising can be said to have some affinities with a minor and contrasting perspective on the church's social existence stemming from the tradition of political pluralism.

²³⁸ Miller, A.S, *Speculative Grace: Bruno Latour and Object-Oriented Theology* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), p. 17. For Latour, see Latour, B, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor Network Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), and for a detailed application of Latour's thought to theological themes see, Baker, C., James, Thomas A., and Reader J., *A Philosophy of Christian Materialism: Entangled Fidelities and the Public Good* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2015).

²³⁹ See Baker, C, *The Hybrid Church in the City: Third Space Thinking* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2007), pp.120-122.

Interactive pluralism²⁴⁰

A pluralist tradition within Anglican social thought has its origins in the work of J.N. Figgis²⁴¹ and has been a transatlantic school of thought with both secular and religious advocates.²⁴² Although sharing some idealist conceptions of the social nature of human beings, in which people are shaped and communal perfection sought through their social interactions, Figgis was opposed to forms of idealism which took the modern nation state as the locus for such developments. Rather than the context of a national community in the state, Figgis regarded socialisation as occurring more realistically within smaller local groups – ‘a parish, or county, union or regiment’.²⁴³ An overarching state was seen as a menace to human social development and needed to be counteracted. The state was conceived as having a more limited role in mediating disputes between the groups that composed it. Individual freedom flourished for Figgis in the context of local associative life. Stears writes, ‘The first pluralists urged the disintegration of the powers and responsibilities of the central state and its replacement with a nexus of many small, decentralised, independent associations, each of which would govern its own affairs. Only then could associations assist their own members attainment of their particular communal perfection.’²⁴⁴

The phrase ‘interactive pluralism’ was coined by Williams, and his addition of ‘interactive’ to ‘pluralism’ implies that pluralism needs now to be seen as a more active political project in a tradition which has been largely an intellectual one. Political pluralism was developed as a conception of the relation of independent social bodies in the state. ‘Interactive pluralism’, I suggest, shifts the emphasis away from arguments about the social form of the state and redirects this political philosophy into a more practical political mode. Organising’s capacity, as Bretherton contends, ‘to uphold or forge anew an institutional plurality that serves as a bulwark against the totalising thrust of modern forms of economic and political power’²⁴⁵, can be seen to have a connection with the pluralist tradition. Organising’s active

²⁴⁰ The title of this section is taken from Williams, R, ‘*Law, Power and Peace: Christian Perspectives on Sovereignty, The David Nicholls Memorial Lecture*’, 25th September 2005, University Church of St Mary the Virgin, Oxford, published in Williams, R, *Faith in the Public Square* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2012), p.53.

²⁴¹ Figgis’s classic work is, Figgis, J. N, *Churches in the Modern State* (London: Longmans Green & Co., 1914).

²⁴² Figgis was followed in England by G.D.H. Cole and Harold Laski, and more recent advocates have included: David Nicholls, Paul Hirst, Rowan Williams, and Mark D. Chapman. See: Nicholls, D, *The Pluralist State: The Political Ideas of J.N. Figgis and his Contemporaries* (Basingstoke: The Macmillan Press, 1975); Hirst, P, *Associative Democracy: New Forms of Economic and Social Governance* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994); Chapman, M. D, *Doing God, Religion and Public Policy in Brown’s Britain* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2008), pp.84-89.

²⁴³ Figgis, J. N, *Churches in the Modern State* (London: Longmans Green & Co., 1914), p.48.

²⁴⁴ Stears, M, *Progressives, Pluralists, and the Problems of the State: Ideologies of reform in the United States and Britain, 1909-1926* (Oxford: OUP, 2002), p.94.

²⁴⁵ Bretherton, L, *Christianity and Contemporary Politics: The Conditions and Possibilities of Faithful Witness* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), p.94.

promotion and local defence of pluralism can be said to provide something of the active political corrective that Williams implies has been missing from what has been a more purely intellectual movement.

The scale and agency of this politics are also dimensions of its practice which have critiqued the dominant culture of Anglican social ethics, perhaps most conspicuously in its work for a living wage. The present location of the church in society calls for a more flexible approach to ethical issues.

Community organising and Anglican social ethics

The tradition of Anglican social ethics is faced, in a context of national institutional decline and public marginalisation, with questions of organisational strategy in responding to human need in society. Anglicans and other churches can no longer rely on traditional approaches and need more tactical flexibility in pressing ethical issues politically. Community organising in England has been a movement that has highlighted some of the shortcomings of traditional approaches to social ethics within changed social and political circumstances. Although only one example of an alternative approach, it has demonstrated that a more bottom-up and participative method can be highly effective. From a mainstream Anglican perspective, community organising's approach to social issues shares some aspects of the middle-axiom approach to social issues, which has been the most influential tradition in Anglican social ethics in the post-war decades. In the middle-axiom approach, as described by one of its interpreter's Ronald Preston, the methodological approach to social issues is:

Identify the problem. This involves a negative judgement on the *status quo*. Christians have a radical faith. They are taught not to be satisfied with things as they are and in particular to be sensitive to all who are marginalised, so they are not likely to lack issues to take up.

- 1) Gets at the 'facts' by searching for the relative evidence from those involved in the problem, whether as expert witnesses or as experiencing it personally.
- 2) Try to arrive at a broad consensus about what should be done – first of all from a middle level. This aims at a general direction at which policy should aim. Since there are always disagreements on public policies, among Christians, no less than the general public, this puts the onus on the objector if a Church Report can produce an agreement on the general direction of policy. If it chooses, a Church Report can go on to recommend detailed policies, though the more detailed they are the more likely they are to be affected by the inevitable uncertainties in obtaining facts; these can often be evaluated and interpreted differently. Still more are the uncertainties in forecasting the effects of any detailed policies that are advocated.²⁴⁶

Where community organising differs from this approach to social ethics is in relocating aspects of a similar methodology (organising breaks problems down into issues and engages in research involving experts) as part of a participative method that flows and is sustained directly from the sociality of the church and other communities, rather than from more institutional and bureaucratic levels of social

²⁴⁶ Brown, M, *Tensions in Christian Ethics* (London: SPCK, 2010), p.91.

and political life. What tends to be implicit in Preston's view is that the church is not capable of being a source of ethical agency beyond the role that is given to it by its historic place as an institution at the corporate heart of the church's life in society and the state. That the agency to address an ethical issue might come from and be coordinated by those working with the group affected by an issue at lower levels and outside specialised institutional structures and networks, effectively stops in Preston's model after evidence has been taken from those affected by an issue.

If we take the issue of low pay as an example, the middle-axiom approach would almost certainly have resulted in a policy report on low pay which the church would have urged the Government to consider. London Citizen's approach, in the context of the dissolving of the Low Pay Unit by the Labour Government, was to commission their own expert research on low pay at the same time as building an ecumenical and participative movement to put moral pressure on employees in the market and the state to pay a living wage. Community organising networks have staged countless small public actions, in which those living on low wages, cleaners for example, have been brought face to face with those who negotiated their contracts. Employers heard from employees what it was like to live on low wages and the mutual benefits that paying a living wage might have for both employers and employees were discussed openly in an orderly and civil manner. The differences in these approaches are not necessarily incompatible as dual strategies for the church as an institution with a residual public presence at national political levels. Although, now that it is harder for the church to win a hearing in governing circles, it will become increasingly necessary to adopt more flexible strategies towards social issues and public policy, and the practices of organising may come to have a wider influence across a broad terrain of social action.²⁴⁷

What is not assumed in community organising, and here it differs significantly from the mainstream tradition of Anglican social ethics over the post-war decades, is that the changes it seeks will come simply from a change of hearts and minds as a result of the careful compiling of reports that may or may not be read by influential figures of public and political life. Reports, good arguments, and influential public figures are important, and the Independent Asylum Commission that arose from immigration issues in the south London community organisation published several reports as well as benefitting from engaging commissioners with expert advice. But what has been most striking in its work has been its continuing basis in the responsible action of affected people, many of them from the churches and other communities of faith who testified at public hearings in different parts of the country

²⁴⁷ The need for the Church of England to develop more flexible approaches towards social issues, and a call for 'policy focused coalitions', was a key proposal made in Henry Clarke's study of Anglican social responsibility. See Clarke, H, *The Church Under Thatcher* (London: SPCK, 1993), pp.120-126.

and at which personal griefs were mobilised as a morally effective means towards changing public policy.²⁴⁸

Conclusion:

Unlearning Christendom through a practice of politics

The central claim of this thesis has been that through the minor tradition of the politics of community organising, a discernment of the church as an active social and political body in the world can reappear. As Christendom finally dissolves in the 20th century, Cavanaugh notes, there has been a corresponding growth in political theologies which ‘can be read as so many attempts to come to grips with the death of Christendom without simply acquiescing in the privatisation of the church’.²⁴⁹ Cavanaugh goes on to say that there has, however, been little attention in political theology to considering the church as itself a directly political body – ‘that it embodies a politics’.²⁵⁰ The phenomenon of community organising suggests that the church is not understood or experienced as ‘a directly political body’ because it has largely ceased to be one, and that this lack in its self-understanding is a consequence of the loss of political dimensions to its life as a sociality in the world with the decline of Christendom. Such a decline creates a corresponding deterioration in the discernment of its life as a distinctive body in the world. What organising suggests, and perhaps what Cavanaugh does not sufficiently consider, is the degree to which an accessible mode of politics is now necessary for the church in order for the ordinary life of its members to have a sufficient discernment of their membership of a body amongst other bodies in an increasingly and irrevocably plural world. At the micro level of congregations, organising can reveal this present necessity of politics as generative of a discernment of lost dimensions of the church’s life as a body in the world. What perhaps went missing in Christendom and in the church’s accommodation to the politics of society and the state in modernity returns through a politics in which Christendom is unlearned and fresh social and political dimensions of the church in a plural world can be relearned. A sense of collective embodiment is given practical and imaginative space to return internally and externally, communally, as an intensified sense of our human grounding in a world that is

²⁴⁸ Examples of reports published by the Independent Asylum Commission are: Back, L, et al, *A Humane Service for Global Citizens: A Report on the South London Citizens Enquiry into Service Provision by Immigration and Nationality Directorate at Lunar House*, 2005; Hobson, C, et al, *Saving Sanctuary: The Independent Asylum Commission’s first report of conclusions and recommendations*, 2008.

²⁴⁹ Cavanaugh, W. T, *Migrations of The Holy: God, State, And The Political Meaning Of The Church* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2011), p.123.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p.139.

ethically a matter of the quality of our lives as manifest in the realm of encounter between persons.

A return of the repressed ?

Such a return might not always be welcomed, insofar as the church has often got used to living without a politics practiced by its own members and seen as integral to its existence in the world. This is another reason why, as a politics, despite its 70-year history, community organising has had such a low profile in ecclesial circles. Organising can remind the church of elements of its own history that it has learnt to live without, or has objectified and divided practically from the life of its own social existence. As a politics in which the theological and practical horizons of the church can be experienced interacting with a radical form of democracy, perhaps a usually repressed or displaced dimension of the church's witness as a social (Pauline) body in the world comes into view. Despite many church people probably agreeing with the view that politics and religion do mix, these same Christians can often view religion and politics as mixing only at distant levels. In such a perception, the church can have political views, but these are often and only the views politics as it operates within the terms of a wider society and the state. When people think of politics, the actually existing church, the people they mix with on a Sunday, are distanced from any available conception of politics. Politics is conventionally thought of as being done elsewhere and by other people, and although its importance is often conceded by believers, it is rarely the case that they have a conception of politics that might practically flow from the more mundane level of the life of their local assembly.

Modern Christians have perhaps internalised more than they care to admit of the secular myth that if the church does engage directly in politics it will be of a violent and oppressive kind, and that the loss of more direct political horizons is to be welcomed because the secular state has saved us from the wars of religion.²⁵¹

Community organising can effectively disarm such myths and help overcome a severing of links between the theological and the political revealing a continuum of peaceful witness in which the church has greater freedom to act as both a devotion and a politics. The Church of England has been said to have had traditional social horizons that have constituted 'a public/private holism'.²⁵² A session in the teaching curriculum of organising proposes a distinction between the public and the private that would seem to both put it at odds with historic Anglican social horizons and with a fairly widespread view within the Catholic community that a distinction between public and private has been the way in which the state controls the church.²⁵³ The distinction between the public and the private taught within

²⁵¹ Exploring this myth has been a key topic in Cavanaugh's work; for example, Cavanaugh, W. T, "A fire strong enough to consume the house": the wars of religion and the rise of the state,' *Modern Theology*, 11/4, (1995), p.400.

²⁵² Furbey, R, et al, 'Breaking with Tradition? The Church of England and Community Organising', *Community Development Journal*, 32, (Oxford University Press, April, 1997), p.4.

²⁵³ For example, Lash, N, 'The Church in the State We're In', in Gregory Jones, L, and Buckley, J. J, eds., *Spirituality and Social Embodiment* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), p.123.

community organising can sharpen reflection on the social location of the church and the quality of its public life. Yet, paradoxically for Anglicans, it can also suggest, *contra* the teaching of community organising, a dimension of its historic practical existence locally from which it has indeed been separated and which politically, and in a radically decentralised mode, it might in future help repair.

Practical and theoretical horizons

The practices of organising operate on the threshold between the church and world in a horizon of the church's existence as a sociality. Its practices can dis-embed settled conceptions of the temporal horizons of the church from a standpoint within internal ecclesial horizons, which usually hold to more collective and theoretical conceptions of the church's place in societies and states. The practical focus to its work means that, as one of my interviewees put it, organising 'is somewhat resistant to abstraction'²⁵⁴. The practices of organising are primarily mediated and interpreted through a sociality in which the realm of practical rather than theoretical reason is dominant. What is mediated to its participants is evoked largely through oral and communal repertoires of conversation, teaching, storytelling, testimony and action, all of which are participative activities that depend upon their social nature as activities for the full validity of the realm they constitute and represent to become apparent. It is something of this renewed communal and political perception for ecclesial participants that has been manifest in the work of organising that has stimulated the most recent interest in community organising in the theological community. The perspective of Bretherton's recent work, for example, I argue, would not have been possible without the practical and intellectual stimulation of the theopolitical standpoint opened up by his experience and reflection upon community organising.²⁵⁵ Where Bretherton's recent writing now signals perhaps an important shift, I suggest, is that the writing itself flows from a sensible horizon, from what has been seen and heard and touched, in the actual performed spaces and practices of a post-secular politics. This then acts to orientate and position the more abstract and theoretical engagement with theological, social, and political analysis. Much of the energy of late-20th and early-21st-century theology has been a return of intellectual confidence *viz a viz* secular discourses, but what might now be emerging importantly in both practical and theoretical modes, is the sociality of the church as an increasingly important mediation of its theological life as a social body in the world. What returns through organising, and what I suggest has been a source of stimulation for recent interest in its work, are the social horizons of the church as both practical and theoretical horizons that receive a new standpoint for interrogation.

²⁵⁴ Sichel, S, MFS, *London Citizens and London Clergy: Exploring the influence of Community Organising on the Ministries of Clergy in London*, Kings College, London, 2011.

²⁵⁵ Bretherton, L, 'Augustine, Alinsky, and the Politics of the Common Good', in *Christianity and Contemporary Politics: The Conditions and Possibilities of Faithful Witness* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell 2010); Bretherton, L, *Resurrecting Democracy: Faith, Citizenship, and the Politics of a Common Life* (Cambridge: CUP, 2015).

A path beyond individualism and the market society

In the first chapter I suggested that Taylor's conception of a post-Durkheimian mind-set was normative in the inner city and across the ecumenical breadth of the church. What I suggest can be learnt from organising in this area is a path beyond an individualism that has become normative. In its assistance with facilitating the cooperative capacities and energies of the *ecclesia* as a social body in the world, organising can be said to perform perhaps its most important service to the contemporary church. The greatest danger facing the church under the sovereignty of the market, capital flows, and a culture of consumerism, is that its sociality as a distinctive body in the world is simply engulfed and co-opted by the power of a market culture whose individualism is widely shared by the church. The logic of the market is now normative in every institution in society and widely threatens to make the church conform theologically to its social horizons.²⁵⁶

In his discussion of recent Christian eschatology, Fletcher characterises it as a 'promise that is never fulfilled' and argues that 'the eschatology of our theologians and the eschatology of capital are a mirror image of each other except for the important fact that the arborescent structure of debt and command are ubiquitous in capitalism and remind us that we inhabit not the Kingdom of God but these immanent networks of economic and desiring flows'.²⁵⁷ Uncertain social and political horizons for the People of God should signal a danger to the church that the power of the market's eschatology will simply colonise the theological horizons of the church as a social and political body. A small resistance to such flows, in the service of the church and local communities can be seen to be at work in the practices of organising.

Clergy and the parish

Percy sees a 'bifurcation of the *ecclesia* from the *parochia*' as emerging even before the Reformation and suggests that local congregational horizons, rather than parochial horizons, now more realistically describe the place of the Church of England in society.²⁵⁸ Settling for such a location without more intentional social horizons might, however, simply reinforce an internal focus on congregational life as the only possible future for the church, leaving it defenceless against the dismembering forces surrounding it. As a polity, I have emphasised, the Anglican clergy have been religious and political figures in society. Anglicans still refer to the time between the leaving of one incumbent and the arrival of another as an

²⁵⁶ The ideology of the market permeating the ontological horizons of the church is a reality that can be observed. I live in an area of London that has visibly changed in the past four years through a process widely referred to as 'gentrification'. I recently heard a minister give thanks to God for the transformative ways in which he was to be at work in the neighbourhood.

²⁵⁷ Fletcher, P, *Disciplining the Divine: Toward an (Im)political Theology* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2009), p.155.

²⁵⁸ Percy, M, *Clergy: The Origin of Species* (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2006), p.86.

interregnum, the interval between the reigns of two monarchs. Anglican clergy no longer rule parochially, yet parochial horizons, especially for stipendiary clergy remain and might effectively become, as plural social and religious horizons, grounds in which to envision a rebuilding of the social in a radically democratic mode. Sennett writes in his discussion of social cooperation: ‘We want to imagine ... community as a process of coming into the world, a process in which people work out both the value of face-to-face relations and their limits. For poor or marginalised people, the limits are political and economic; the value is social.’²⁵⁹

Anglicans, their social and political horizons in society largely lost, yet still with a national institutional presence, might see their vocation as partly being about rebuilding such a sense of the social and political among and between institutions and groups in the nation. Raymond Williams, with whose description of how we think about society I began in chapter one, notes that the complex changes in our historical understanding of the concept of society can be seen to have moved from an emphasis on reference to a companionable realm of active social fellowship to a more abstract sense of an institutional societal whole.²⁶⁰ Rebuilding a social world through ‘active social fellowship’ out of the communal dimensions of the practices of religious communities could surely be part of the vocation of the church in our present circumstances. A broad ecumenical project to promote such a *communis sensus* from the ground up might be an admirable missional task in which communities of faith might cooperate in future.

The future of the church and community organising

Community organising is a comparatively small initiative in organisational terms. It is a medium-size charity with a staff of approximately 35 people. It has reorganised itself recently as a charity and is projecting itself more intentionally as a national organisation under the umbrella of Citizens UK. Such a development is welcome, but it does mean that the roots of its work in specific local communities are somewhat left behind in terms of organisational focus and strategy. Its successes as a charity has been based on the careful and painstaking work of building networks of community groups in local areas, largely in London, and this dimension of its work remains foundational to its value to the church as the People of God and to other communities.

A worthy project for the church in future, in affiliation and in cooperation with the work of Citizens UK, would be to create an Ecumenical Institute for Community Organising, in which generic organising with congregations and communities in local areas would be the primary focus of its work. The issues such communities might work on would be of less significance than the longer-term process of

²⁵⁹ Sennett, R, *Together: The Rituals, Pleasures & Politics of Cooperation* (London: Penguin Books, 2013), p.273.

²⁶⁰ Williams, R, *Keywords: A vocabulary of culture and society* (London: Fontana Press, 1988), pp.291-295.

instilling social and political horizons back into local congregational perceptions more widely. A national strategy as a platform for leveraging communal power at higher levels of national life, seen in the recent organisational changes in Citizens UK, is not a strategy that will necessarily embed organising's practices deep enough for a genuine project of building a *communis sensus* from the ground up to take root and grow in the longer term. Rooting a perception of the church as social and political body through the practices of organising within local ecclesial assemblies is a demanding and slow process.²⁶¹ As organisers often say themselves, there just is not enough community organising available.

Organising has struggled in its first two decades of existence in England to find an institutional welcome at higher levels of the church, but by now the church should perhaps be persuaded of its value to the church's mission and put any monies it might find into furthering its missional work in developing social discipleship ecumenically. The church and other communities of faith would be best served in the longer term in developing politically by supporting a longer process of development in such discipleship at the grass roots through the practices of organising in local congregations. Such an institute could potentially develop beyond local communities of faith to network a broad array of social responsibility and research agencies that recognise the changed location of the church and other institutions in society and the necessity of more active and relational methods of pressing social issues cooperatively. For Anglicans, such an institute might be developed as a network across the dioceses.

A ministry of accompaniment

In terms of the missional development of the Church of England in future decades, the example and experience of organising suggests that traditional hierarchies and leadership in the church need to shift their focus away from maintaining the remnants of their public position in a societal church, and see their ministries as more intentionally directed towards nurturing the church as a national missional network of local ecclesial communities. A ministry of accompaniment in which the culture of the church as a local body is guided in its development in a reconceived imagination of its life as an associative network, through which the work of the Spirit might be discerned as that which assists the growth of the People of God as a sacred, secular, and prophetic movement in the contemporary world.

²⁶¹ I note this challenge in my original research: Sichel, S, MFS, '*London Citizens and London Clergy: Exploring the influence of Community Organising on the Ministries of Clergy in London*', Kings College, London, 2011, p.50.

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Appendix:

A Statement on the Relation of the Thesis to the Programme for the DThMin

I began this programme when it was entitled the DMin (Doctorate in Ministry) and during my studies the title was changed to the DThMin (Doctorate in Theology and Ministry). During my years of study, 2008-2015, the curriculum underwent some changes and what follows represents my relation to the curriculum as it existed in the years 2008-2010.

The taught years of the course were comprised in the first year of modules entitled: The Theology of Ministry and The Role of the Minister, with courses on Christian Doctrine, Moral Theology and Professional Ethics, Approaches to Biblical Studies, followed by courses on Spirituality and Education. In the second year the module, The Role of the Minister, was continued with courses on Cultural Theology, Sociology of Religion and the Contemporary Religious Context, Church History (including clerical identity), Liturgical Theology, and Research Methods, the latter in preparation for the Ministerial Focused Study, which would be researched and written in the following two years. That study, 'London Citizens and London Clergy: Exploring the Influence of Community Organising on the Ministry of Clergy in London', was followed by embarking on the RBT (Research Based Thesis), which took up the final three years of the programme.

I had decided to pursue the DThMin with a view eventually to researching and writing about my dual experience of organising and parochial ministry. To that end, I tried to select or suggest titles for essays from the taught component of the course that might assist me to begin thinking through my experience in relation to the course material.

Among the six essays over the first two years, I wrote an essay discussing whether doctrine was 'a resource or obstacle to the fostering of Christian faith today', in which I explored the question in the context of the growth of Pentecostalism and its presence in the area where I work. Spirited horizons for Pentecostals have been in the back of my mind while I have thought about the work of community organising in relation to the life of ecclesial members. Although I do not explore this topic directly, the position I take on doctrine, particularly in relation to my discussion of transformation theology – that its origins may lie more in the sociality of ecclesial action and reflection rather than is sufficiently accounted for in its positioning as a second-order account – was partly stimulated by this course.

I wrote an essay contrasting the unlikely pairing of Archbishop William Temple and Saul Alinsky for the course on education, in which I explored ideal and practical conceptions of politics in the context of a Greek understanding of *paideia* as a politically directed education. The contrast between idealist and more practical

conceptions of the church's social life has been a constant theme in the thesis. I wrote an essay on spatiality for the course on Cultural Theology in which I used the spatial thinking of some social theorists and the spatial thinking of, for example, Karl Barth, in an attempt to critique conceptions of church proliferating in 'Fresh Expressions' and other missional initiatives. A spatial as well as temporal theme intrudes from time to time in my thesis, for example in the discussions of embodiment and Pauline sociality. I wrote an essay in liturgical theology, in which the question of how theology is embodied or not embodied in our ecclesial practices was explored.

The course on Research Methods was helpful in preparing for the empirical study and later became a rather unexpected insight into an element of some significance in Saul Alinsky's journey from being a researcher in Criminology to creating People's Organisations, which I note in chapter two of the thesis.